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Deuxième session, 41^e législature

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Jeudi 9 mars 2017



Speaker
Honourable Dave Levac

Clerk
Todd Decker

Président
L'honorable Dave Levac

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

Thursday 9 March 2017

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

Jeudi 9 mars 2017

The House met at 0900.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Good morning. Please join me in prayer.
Prayers.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2017 LOI DE 2017 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'AIDE MÉDICALE À MOURIR

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 7, 2017, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 84, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to medical assistance in dying / Projet de loi 84, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'aide médicale à mourir.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I'm pleased to join the debate today because this is a very important issue that I am hearing time and again from constituents at home in the riding of Huron-Bruce, and a lot of my comments are going to reflect on their feelings.

Before I begin, I very much want to tip my hat to the member from Elgin-Middlesex-London. Our critic for health has done an amazing job doing authentic consultations, reaching out to people from far and wide across this province to understand the scope of what Bill 84 implies and how they feel about it.

To kick off, I need to impress upon the government today that it's not complete. I implore this government to support an amendment that the member from Elgin-Middlesex-London will be bringing forward with regard to doctors' conscience rights because it's my understanding that there's no other jurisdiction around this world that takes away the rights of the doctors to do what they feel in their conscience is the right thing.

So, with that, I'm going to say thank you to people from my riding: Mark and Joy Moores; Eileen Sleightholm; Penny Wiest; Michael Smith; Gary Schlack; Maureen Wilkins; Suzanne Anderson; Peter van Diepen; Mary Flannery; Ron, Daniel, Adam and Ingrid DeVisser; James Chin Yut; Ronald Garinther; Anne Zondervan; Stephanie Schilthuis; David McCutcheon; Brenda Peck; Jim O'Toole; Denise Morris; Heather Zettler; Marion Leifso; Crystal Powers; Doug and Julie

Debus; Matilda Rau; Stephen Bujaki; Mary Rigden; Yvonne Bulger; Danise Scapinello; Danielle Roelands; Stephen La Rocque; Barbara Durrer; MaryJo Nelson; Willard and Vanessa Ropp; Suzanne Kilpatrick; Richard Arsenault; Joan Agnew; Mary-Catherine McKeon; Henry Morrissey; Thomas Bailey; Gerald and Anne Ryan; Darlene Schiestel; and Virginia Kieffer. These are people who so eloquently put their thoughts to paper to demonstrate that Bill 84, as it's written today, is not complete. They totally support the amendment that the PC Party is bringing forward with regard to doctors' conscience rights. We really hope that the government supports it when it goes into committee.

I want to read a particular section of the charter—specifically an excerpt from a decision that was handed down. In case anyone is interested in reading the complete text of the decision that I'm about to reference, its citation is 2015 SCC 5:

"An absolute prohibition on physician-assisted dying is rationally connected to the goal of protecting the vulnerable from taking their life in times of weakness, because prohibiting an activity that poses certain risks is a rational method of curtailing the risks."

The ruling went on to say that "the evidence does not support the contention that a blanket prohibition is necessary in order to substantially meet the government's objective.... a permissive regime with properly designed"—I repeat, "properly designed"—"and administered safeguards was capable of protecting vulnerable people from abuse and error" and "that vulnerability can be assessed on an individual basis, using the procedures that physicians apply in their assessment of informed consent and decisional capacity in the context of medical decision-making more generally."

It is apparent to me, Speaker, given the balanced approach used by the judge in considering the intent of the prohibition as it stood and the need to respect the wishes of a patient who is living with a terminal or painful illness and has the capacity to understand the implications of what they're asking their medical professional as well as make informed decisions, that there was much careful consideration at a judicial level in how to address this matter, especially when one considers that this was an issue that was extended over two years and saw significant testimony from scientists, medical practitioners and others who are familiar with end-of-life decision-making in Canada and abroad.

In fact, I received a note from a resident of Huron-Bruce just this past weekend expressing these concerns. I'd like to share some of what was written. This is over

and above the responses and the thoughts that were shared that I just listed from people previously, a couple of minutes ago. In particular, this one constituent in Huron-Bruce said:

“Bill 84 ... has put our doctors and nurses in a very bad situation, as it is forcing health care workers or institutions to act against their conscience.

“We are insisting that our government provide conscience protection for our medical professionals.”

In December, Mary-Catherine wrote to me that “Ontario health care workers whose conscience will not allow them to perform euthanasia ... must not be compelled to pass this death on to someone else, as this also goes against their moral ethics.”

Speaker, again I implore this government of the day to please ensure that Ontario provides the same protection for health care workers as other Canadian provinces and jurisdictions around the world that have legalized euthanasia or assisted suicide.

My colleague from Nepean-Carleton specifically pointed out that Maureen Taylor, who was co-chair of the Provincial-Territorial Expert Advisory Group on Physician-Assisted Dying, appeared before the committee on Bill 41. Maureen Taylor advocated that there needs to be support for the rights of health care practitioners to not participate in assisted death if it goes against their conscience.

The College of Nurses of Ontario, HealthCARE, the Ontario Medical Association, the Canadian Medical Association and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario all support provisions for nurses and doctors to refuse medical assistance in dying, or MAID, on the basis of personal or ethical objections. In the case of the latter two, they have also highlighted the matter of effective referrals, or requiring a physician to refer a patient to another medical practitioner capable of and willing to offer MAID.

I know that my colleague has been conversing diligently with them—my colleague, that is, from Elgin-Middlesex-London. I know that the results of those conversations will be manifested during committee because this government will do the right thing and protect the conscience rights of our doctors. But as the House can see, there's so much more that needs to be done with regard to getting this bill right. It is unfortunate, Speaker, because this isn't the first time this government has rushed legislation or erred on the health care file.

0910

The continued cuts to health care are having an impact on Ontarians. Just this past week, I had the opportunity to attend the most impactful conference I've attended in recent years, and that is the Daughters of the Vote. It was amazing, the young ladies who stood up and spoke about the impacts that cuts to health care are having on their communities, specifically with regard to mental health. I know, especially in my own home riding of Huron-Bruce—my offices in Kincardine and Blyth are routinely receiving calls from residents who are having to wait longer and longer to see their own doctor, or they can't

even get one at all, and they end up having to go to the ER and visit a doctor who is a locum. He's not from the community. He's just parachuting in and being pulled back out after the weekend is over. And these people are getting different opinions every time they turn around.

That is not good, progressive health care in 2017. We need consistency, we need accessibility, and we need to also respect the rights of doctors. We in the PC Party of Ontario totally support our critic for health and long-term care. The member from Elgin-Middlesex-London has got it right, Speaker. The work he has done is phenomenal, and again, he has taken time to consult, he has taken time to listen, he has taken time to ask questions of the right people: all things that this government has failed to do with regard to Bill 84 and specifically around conscience rights of doctors.

I will say that while I appreciated the Minister of Health's comments at ROMA this past month, we still have work to do. So I ask him to reach out across the floor, delve down on the amendment that the PC Party is bringing forward through our critic for health and long-term care, and let's get Bill 84 right. Let's protect conscience rights of doctors. Residents throughout Huron-Bruce and across Ontario are asking us to do the right thing.

Speaker, for goodness' sake, I really hope we can get this done when this Bill 84 gets to committee. In closing, I hope the government has listened intently today and supports our efforts, because for goodness' sake, we have to start getting it right for Ontarians.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I have recently had the opportunity to speak with a nurse practitioner in my riding who has assisted two people under this new legislation. I wanted to find out what her perspective was. She is a palliative care nurse who represents an area which is geographically massive, from Kenora in the west all the way to Ignace in the east and north up to Sioux Lookout. She did say that there is a real lack of health care providers right now who are willing to provide this service. She said that there seems to be a lot of fear in the health care community about having protection for health care providers. There's a concern, with something so new, that it may come back to hurt them in some way.

She also talked about the fact that—the problems that this can pose, with not having enough professionals to provide this service across the province. She specifically raised the question: What happens if there's somebody in, say, Cat Lake First Nation, a remote First Nation, who would like to benefit from this? Can we even provide it in the community or do we need to fly those people down? What does that mean for those families? There are some challenges with that, because one of the points that she underscored is that we need to be able to provide this service professionally, universally and consistently. Until we can do that, we have some problems.

She did mention a positive beneficial change. She did say that, with both of the clients that she has assisted,

both of them expressed concerns about their benefits being withheld. So she did mention that's a positive change.

There are some other changes that we need to make. One of the biggest things that she also underscored was the need for more education for the medical community to alleviate concerns and to bring more people on board if they're comfortable with that.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Fraser: I just—to reflect on the member's debate, this bill is very specifically about what the member from Kenora—Rainy River was saying. Physicians are looking for protection. They're concerned. The measures in this bill are about ensuring their civil liability protection, ensuring that patients are protected for insurance and WSIB, Coroners Act, records. That's what this bill is about. There's no doubt that we have to have a discussion and a resolution to make space for all those, for all of us to be able to practise in a way that agrees with our conscience. We're going to have to find that balance, but we've got to keep our eye on the ball on this bill. This bill is about protecting patients and allowing physicians to be able to opt in, if they wish, with the knowledge that they have some legislative protection.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments.

Mrs. Gila Martow: I think that there's a lot of concern out in our communities—not just from the member from Huron—Bruce about her community, but in all communities. Doctors have spoken about it before. Doctors who go in to study medicine are very compassionate people, very empathetic people. That's what makes great doctors.

There's a Dr. Halperin who wrote a letter to the editor this morning. I can't remember if it was in the Toronto Star or the National Post. He said that his patients know, and he wants his patients to be absolutely certain, that he is doing everything he can to make them healthy and make them live as long as possible. That's basically what he is saying. He doesn't want his patients having in the back of their mind that he's ever going to give up on them. I think those were his exact words: "I will never give up on my patients." He does not want a piece of legislation that puts him in a very uncomfortable situation where his patients might suspect that he is giving up on them because he's encouraging them to either have a referral or contemplate assisted dying.

I think we do have to be aware of the consequences and the repercussions of our actions. Sometimes with legislation I think it happens much too often that laws are put in place by the government even for the right reasons, but there are unintended consequences. I'm very concerned that we will lose our most empathetic doctors who want to work in our communities. It's not just a career or a job; it's really a passion for assisting people in their communities. I'm worried that those doctors will choose to practise in other jurisdictions because we aren't focusing on ensuring that their conscience rights are protected.

That's why we're here today debating. We're going to be taking this bill into committee. We're going to be hearing from a lot of people in a lot of communities. I hope the government will be listening intently and get this right.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments.

Mr. Wayne Gates: I want to talk about the bill. I listened to my colleague on the other side talk about what the bill is about and protecting patients and talking about WSIB. The issue, I think, that everybody is talking about on this bill is consultation and who we're talking to. Are we talking to our doctors? Are we talking to our hospitals? Are we talking to everybody? I'm not so sure, although I've heard from the other side and they say they have. But when I hear the criticism coming from other parties, obviously that's a big concern.

I said this the other day, and I think it's important to say—because some of the doctors feel that their job is to try to do all they can to keep us alive. I mentioned this the last time I spoke on this bill, because we've had a number of deaths in our family over the last year, and I've watched how everybody has responded. The one that really stuck in my mind—because my dad has been gone for a long, long time, and my mom has been gone for a long, long time. My wife's father passed away in June. Now, we all loved him to death. But do you know the hardest thing that my wife is having with this? Every day she says, "I wish I could have had my dad one more day. I wish I could have told my dad that I loved him one more day." That's why I think we have to have that broader discussion on how we're going to do this, because it has been seven or eight months and it's still right here in her heart. I think we want to keep our family members as long as we can. As the doctors are saying, "My job is to make sure I get you that extra day, or I get you that extra week, or I get you that extra two weeks. That's my job as a doctor."

0920

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return to the member from Huron—Bruce to wrap up.

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: I appreciate the comments that I heard from my colleagues this morning.

The member from Kenora—Rainy River really hit the nail on the head when she said that there is a fear throughout the health care community of where this legislation could go.

The member from Thornhill is absolutely right: We have to be so mindful of the repercussions that could come out of legislation. When we do not consult, when we think we're all-knowing, when we think we know better, that's when negative repercussions can happen. This is what the health care community is afraid of with this particular government of the day.

The member from Ottawa South mentioned that we have to have a balanced discussion. For goodness' sake, we should have had the balanced discussion with the proper stakeholders ahead of Bill 84. Let's do right by the health care community and let's have that thoughtful discussion when it's in committee, specifically around

the amendment that my colleague from Elgin—Middlesex—London, the critic for health and long-term care, is going to bring forward.

The member from Niagara Falls is absolutely right: This is about our loved ones. This is about having the broader discussion to make sure that we have confidence in our health care system, that for those choosing a certain path, the door is open to them. But in doing so, let's make sure that it doesn't put other people in a precarious situation where they feel that they have lost their rights in terms of how they choose to practise medicine in Ontario.

Again, this is very important to consider: the conscience rights of doctors. Let's support our amendment when this bill goes to committee and get Bill 84 right.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am glad to finally have the opportunity to share my thoughts and some thoughts of those around me, frankly, in this debate. I've had the opportunity to speak briefly on Bill 84, the Medical Assistance in Dying Statute Law Amendment Act, in response to the thoughtful comments from many of our colleagues around this Legislature.

I'd like to say, as well, that while I'm speaking today, I know that my almost 96-year-old grandma is watching, because this has been a debate that she has been following. Now that she knows that this channel exists, and she's tuned in and she knows that she can see me every day, she's been watching. As she put it, "It isn't a conversation we want to have, but it's something we need to talk about." And I thought, yes, that's about right, because it is an emotional conversation. It is a very personal conversation. We walk fine lines and try to be respectful of each other's backgrounds and pathways and ideas and beliefs, but ultimately, we share this society together and have to have this conversation.

I'm glad to be doing it today, though, in some respects, I haven't been looking forward to it, because as I've been having conversations in my community, even just in my circle of friends and family—to say that it's a touchy subject doesn't do it justice, of course. We're talking about people's choices to end their lives. That's pretty major. To talk to a friend of mine and have the conversation when you then start talking about children—well, that's a whole other conversation that we were not able to have. But it's part of the broader discussion, isn't it?

Here we find ourselves with a bill that—as the member opposite said, there are protections in here and there are pieces that have to happen in terms of the technical bits; that if we make a change to our health care landscape, there are going to be other pieces that we have to make changes to, whether WSIB insurance pieces or different protections. So we're having that conversation. We're figuring this out. This is uncharted territory, I would say. But I think that it has to be done well; it has to be done right. We know, as anything that matters that we

do, it has to be done in consultation with friends and family and folks across the province.

As we've heard, there are groups who have very significant concerns about what this will look like for them as health care professionals, for them as members of the community, for them as human beings; and also the family members who support individuals and love individuals who are faced with this decision, who are making this decision one way or another, supporting them through that and supporting each other after someone has died through medical assistance in dying.

So I want to talk more holistically because that's how I see our health care system and that's where I see its strength—when we consider all of the pieces and how they have to fit from birth to death, and after, for the families and communities after someone has passed.

We need to ensure excellent access to health care services all the way along. I'm not going to launch into song about hospitals and capacity and being overstretched. I'll just let that hang there because we know that's a battle that we have. But certainly when we're talking about adding in services that are new, we do have to have that conversation about: How will we support those practitioners and professionals? What will the training look like? What will the mental health supports look like? Are there going to be counselling pieces—that we need to have those professionals as part of the service process for families? We need to be looking at that. We need to talk about palliative care, home care, hospice care, end-of-life care, all of that, the whole picture. This is a piece of that. All of those pieces fit neatly together. Sometimes they aren't fitting together, and as we discover those loopholes and broken bits, of course, it's incumbent on us to identify them and address them. As we are bringing in one more part to this, we have to be very conscious of that.

I have lots of thoughts on this. I'm going to start with the consultations and the conversations piece. We have stood, especially on this side, and criticized quite fairly—well, I would say that; we can debate whether it's fair or not—that the consultation process was maybe not what it could have been and should have been. I have heard the defence from the other side, and I recognize there were consultations, and I'm sure those consultations were meaningful and hopefully productive. But what we're hearing from our communities is, they still need to have those conversations. Those conversations are not finished. They need to go forward because it's now, as people are realizing that medical assistance in dying that we saw in discussions in Ottawa—that we thought, "Oh, that's a big conversation, I guess we'll have to have it down the road." There were many involved in those conversations, but here we find it on the provincial level—actually putting things in place to facilitate this service and access to service. All of a sudden, it's in our communities, it's in our families, and our broader community members are wanting to engage now. So this is a time when we need to continue to have those conversations. People want to know what this will look like.

People want to know how this will be accessible to them. Health care professionals—whether they be pharmacists, whether they be mental health service providers, whether they be health care professionals who work in long-term care, whether they be our doctor community—want to know, “What will this look like? How can I stay away from this? How can I be involved in this?” I think now is the time to sit down and really have those conversations.

The member from Huron-Bruce spoke this morning about amendments that they’re bringing forward and spoke about what they’re hearing in their communities. We’re hearing them as well. We’re getting letters in our offices; I know the government is, as well. So we do have to get this right.

I would also say that whatever we go forward with, we must make sure that we continue to evaluate and re-evaluate, because this is going to have ripple effects through our communities that are unintended. We are going to see impacts on families and individuals that we can maybe anticipate, but how are we going to support them? Our northern and rural community members, whether it’s talking about access to a service or access to the care after—we have to look at this across the province and be very specific.

0930

Holy jumpin’, the time has totally disappeared—I don’t mean to make light of it.

I do want to say we respect the voices that we are hearing. We’re getting letters. I’ll read just a bit of one here: “We respectfully suggest that, from an ethical and democratic rights standpoint, it is incumbent upon Ontario to protect its citizens.... Every other jurisdiction in the world, whether provincial, state or federal, that has a legalized MAID process has also instituted protection of the conscientious rights of its health care providers. Surely Ontario should do the same.”

This is a conversation we keep having. How exactly do we navigate this? But these are the voices coming to us. Our doctors are speaking loudly, doctors on both sides of the conversation, and we look to them for their guidance and their care always. We do in this as well.

Back to my grandma: My grandma is almost 96. She’s following this conversation. I don’t know what she would one day choose. I don’t know what I would one day choose. I went through the palliative process with my mother, and this was not a conversation to be had, but we had wonderful palliative care. We had a wonderful journey, all things considered. It was very emotional, but from start to finish, through the palliative process with the caregivers that were coming in—well, I guess we were caregivers, but the caring professionals coming in walked us through it. We understood what was coming next. We understood what our options were. It was very personal while very emotional.

I think we have to look at this whole conversation through that lens. It is very personal. It is very emotional. It matters so much, so let’s do this right.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I can’t let this allegation of lack of consultations go. We had more than 45 different stakeholder groups that were engaged to discuss key issues. We held a series of 11 in-person town hall sessions across the province—nine in English, two in French—in Sudbury, Ottawa, Toronto, Sault Ste. Marie, Barrie, Kingston, London, Thunder Bay and Windsor, and French sessions in Sudbury and London. We actually created and co-chaired a national process of engagement, which included engagement online and in person with Ontarians. To say that this didn’t have adequate consultation is just plain wrong.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. Rick Nicholls: This is a highly sensitive topic, and I appreciate the sincerity that has been demonstrated here in the Legislature.

First of all, I think that Ontario’s regulations must ensure a balance between individual rights—I get that—including the recognition, though, of the conscience rights of health care professionals: those who don’t want to even make a referral to someone else. I heard earlier that doctors are here to try to keep us alive and not to have us die. When I think about, sometimes, the mental capacity of individuals wanting to die—I don’t know whether there’s anything to measure that they’re protected.

The other question, and I would even address the minister on this, is that sometimes family members who perhaps stand to benefit from—that sounds very callous, but it’s a reality.

I think back to 1979, when my mother was diagnosed with cancer throughout her body. Wanting to die was never an option for her. I thank the medical profession, because they kept her as comfortable as possible, and then that moment came when she took her last breath. From a selfish point of view, I didn’t want her to die. I know that she was being kept comfortable with various drugs—morphine and others—but eventually, her time did come.

I would ask, perhaps in committee, that consideration be given to the conscience rights, and then there might be ways of looking at people who stand to benefit, but for the wrong reasons, not the right reasons.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: It’s always an honour to be able to stand in this House and speak on behalf of the residents of Timiskaming-Cochrane, and on this issue, I’ve spoken one time before.

Some of the comments from the member from Oshawa and the comments from the Minister of Health regarding consultation—I think both expressed how—I’m sure for the Minister of Health this is a very personal issue. He’s doing the best job with a very tough issue.

The member from Oshawa—because it’s so personal to us all, quite frankly, this is an issue where there will always be people who feel that there has been a lack of consultation. Some of the best debates in this House have

been held on this issue. The member we just heard from used personal experiences. The member from Niagara Falls used personal experiences. We're all doing this because it's an issue that's so close to our hearts. It's a very tough issue to deal with.

My previous time speaking on this—the thing we have to make sure we maintain is the dignity of choice at the end of life, but that we maintain people's dignity throughout life, that people throughout the province have access to palliative care, people throughout the province have access to a high-quality standard of long-term care and people throughout the province have a high standard of health care. That's something that people from all sides of the House, both as government and in opposition, are striving to provide.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Fraser: Just to respond to the member from Oshawa, I'm sure her grandmother is proud if she's tuned in right now. I'm sure she tunes in every day.

Beyond this debate, if you want to talk about consultation, it's incumbent on all of us as members to engage our community in any way we can. We need to do that.

This is a critical issue—not just this, but the whole end-of-life journey, and making sure the health care system knows what you want, and in thinking about it, thinking about what's important to you.

So trying to balance the rights of a patient and the rights of a practitioner—we have to find enough space to make it work. That's our duty as legislators, and I'm looking forward to this getting to committee.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return to the member from Oshawa to wrap up.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I appreciate the responses and comments from my colleagues around the room.

I'll start with the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Yes, we'll always have the conversation about consultation, what it can and should look like. As he outlined, it was consultation around the province, and it will need to continue to be.

As the member from Ottawa South put it, the continuing engagement across communities—but not just engaging in our communities and in our offices; having a place to put that engagement, I think, is an important piece to this as well. As I mentioned, when we are discovering some of those ripple effects, what do we then do with it? How does that feedback come back and better inform the system, fine-tune it and make it better going forward?

It will always be, as my colleague from Timiskaming—Cochrane said, that balance and need for consultation. It will always be a point of debate and discussion—because there are individuals across our communities who are just now starting to get wind of this conversation because they are on their own journey. That is something we need to bear in mind: How do they now engage in the conversations? How do we learn from them? And how do they better understand what their options are, their choices are?

As the member from Timiskaming—Cochrane said: dignity of choice at end of life but also dignity throughout life. That brings me back to what I had said about that holistic health care, finding our way to strengthen pieces of health care and how they fit together so that, throughout the journey, we have that support.

0940

The member from Chatham—Kent—Essex: Thank you for again reminding us that we have to find that balance with some—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. Further debate? I recognize the member from St. Catharines.

Mr. James J. Bradley: I've been very impressed, over the last several days in the Legislature, with the quality of debate that has taken place on this particular issue. It has not been partisan, in my view. A lot of very personal experiences and personal views have been expressed on legislation that's required as a result of a ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada and federal legislation which calls upon provincial governments to move forward with specific rules and regulations.

All of us have had conversations with those who have very strong views on this. I've heard several members of the House even today make reference to how important it will be in committee to genuinely listen to the people who come before the committee to make their representations. There will no doubt be amendments that will be forthcoming as a result of the conversation here and conversations we've had outside of here.

Bill 84, if passed, will support the implementation of medical assistance in dying by providing more protection and greater clarity for patients, their families and their health care providers. All of those are important people in this particular issue.

Speaker, the issue of death is a difficult topic for anyone to discuss, but it's necessary to have this conversation as a result of the Supreme Court and the federal legislation and as a result of the debate that has taken place across Canada and indeed all over the world.

Here in the Legislature—to show how significant this is—we've been discussing medical assistance in dying for over nine hours, but the conversation certainly isn't over yet. Most of my colleagues in this room have talked about the need to continue consultation with Ontarians despite, as the Minister of Health has said, the fact that there has been extensive consultation. Others have said in the House that some people are just now learning about the legislation and no doubt would like to have that input.

The member for Nipissing, in a very compelling and heartfelt speech, said, "I'm really looking forward to continuing to have conversations at home, in my constituency office, to find out more as people are starting to hear more about the level and depth of this bill, and to hear more of what my constituents have to say." Mr. Fedeli was very sincere in the House when he said that.

Also, my colleague Bob Bailey—I know I'm supposed to use "Sarnia—Lambton," but I call him Bob Bailey; he thinks it's okay but the House does not, so I'll say "the

member for Sarnia–Lambton”—said in the House, “Some of our thoughts on this in caucus are that obviously we want to support this bill. We’d like to see some amendments to it.” That’s very understandable in legislation of this kind.

Similarly, I’ve heard from the third party their support for the bill and the need for everyone to work together to create the best possible legislation. The member from Windsor-Tecumseh said the following: “This bill is very much needed. It’s overdue. It needs support from all sides of the House. It is very sensitive but there’s no denying it has to get done—no denying that—because we have to comply with the federal legislation and have to comply with the Supreme Court of Canada. We have to get together and make this happen because this is something—we have to be sensitive; we have to look out for those who don’t agree with it. But, Speaker, we just have to get together and make it happen,” said Percy Hatfield, the member from Windsor-Tecumseh.

There has been some very interesting and heartfelt debate in here and a desire to see a genuine exercise in committee, which will be benefiting this legislation as it ultimately emerges from this House.

Therefore, I believe it is time that this bill be referred to committee, where all sides of the House will have another opportunity to work together, hear from stakeholders and members of the public, and consider every aspect of this important bill.

As a result, Speaker, I move that the question be now put.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Bradley has moved that the question now be put. The Clerk also informed me that there were 23 speakers over seven days for over nine hours and 40 minutes of debate, so I’m satisfied that sufficient debate time has been allowed for this question to be put to the House.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion that the question now be put, please say “aye.”

All those opposed to the motion, please say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote being required, this will be deferred until after question period.

Vote deferred.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Orders of the day.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 SUR LE SOUTIEN À L'ENFANCE, À LA JEUNESSE ET À LA FAMILLE

Resuming the debate adjourned on March 8, 2017, on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 89, An Act to enact the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, to amend and repeal the Child and Family Services Act and to make related amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 89, Loi édictant la Loi de 2017

sur les services à l’enfance, à la jeunesse et à la famille, modifiant et abrogeant la Loi sur les services à l’enfance et à la famille et apportant des modifications connexes à d’autres lois.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I recognize the member from Prince Edward–Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: It’s a pleasure to continue where we left off last night when we were talking about Bill 89, a piece of legislation that is long overdue. It has been 32 years since this piece of legislation has been updated. A lot has changed over that time.

I only have a short time left, but I do want to talk about some of the great work that has been done by our local children’s aid society, the Highland Shores Children’s Aid Society. I talked yesterday about some of the historical problems that have occurred with some local children’s aid societies in my region, but the Highland Shores Children’s Aid Society, which is responsible for Prince Edward, Hastings and Northumberland counties, is on the right track, Madam Speaker. They’re doing some great work.

Just this past weekend, they had a great event—it was the charitable arm of the CAS, the Children’s Foundation, as it’s known. They had their Guardian Angel Gala. Every year, on March 1, they have a great event at the Sears Atrium in Belleville, where they give a local donor or activist their Guardian Angel wings for the work they do in protecting and supporting children in our region, especially those who are most vulnerable. I know that on Saturday night, Ken and Cynthia Schmidt, who operate the McDonald’s restaurants in Trenton and Brighton, received their Guardian Angel wings. They’re very, very important people in our community for the work that they do, and the philanthropic work that they do as well.

Last year, John and Heather Williams received their Guardian Angel wings. And every year they honour a very influential couple or business person, or even a team of volunteers. The Rick Meagher Charity Golf Classic group received their Guardian Angel wings a few years ago. So it’s really nice that those people are honoured for all the work that they do. Plus we raised a lot of money Saturday night at this gala to support our most vulnerable kids.

One of the great events that the Children’s Foundation also does in Quinte is Reach for Success. I know my colleague from Northumberland–Quinte West has attended this event in the past, as well, where they actually give out \$50 bills to kids who are in the children’s aid society system. They hand out these bills on stage at the Empire Theatre or on stage at Loyalist College, and the kids are just thrilled to receive this. They’ve accomplished something, whether it’s a spelling contest or an art contest or their music lessons. But they get that \$50 reward and it means so much to these kids. If they work hard, they can accomplish great things and they get a nice little red \$50 bill, too, for their work.

So there’s a lot of great things happening at the Highland Shores Children’s Aid Society, and I just wanted to point out a few great things.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I'm glad to give comments. I'm sorry that I missed the bulk of the member's talk. I appreciated hearing just the tail end there, so I will make my comments to that, and of course a little more broadly.

This is our opportunity to finish up or to add to the conversation on Bill 89, which focuses on our children and our youth. I'm the critic for youth engagement, interestingly, and so it's always been an area of focus for me, especially coming out of public education and working with youth from across our communities and really listening to them. I can't help it; I put such value on them, on their journeys and on their voices, and continue to—but in this role, to add in the layers of hearing from the caring professionals who work with them in different ways, through our children's aid societies and in different partner organizations that support our youth.

0950

A piece of this bill that I'd like to have more time to talk about, but I won't right now because I only have 32 seconds left, is bringing the children who are 16 and 17 years old under the care umbrella and what that will look like, the fact that of course it needs to happen. To imagine that we have an identified group of our youth that were falling through the cracks and were left without that care—of course they need to be brought into care and under that umbrella, but what will that look like, and making sure that that's best supported, especially when it comes to the workers delivering that care, their case loads, their care loads.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments.

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's a great pleasure to rise in this House and to speak to Bill 89, which enacts the Child, Youth and Family Services Act.

It's very clear that children, youth—the people—are the best assets of every nation, every jurisdiction. That's why our government, under Premier Kathleen Wynne, is committed to do everything possible so that our kids, our children and our youth reach their full potential. That's why we have brought this bill forward. We're strengthening the current bill so that we can provide the best services for our children and the youth in this province.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments.

Interjection.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): No, you're not in your seat.

Questions and comments?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Very quickly—it's an honour to be able to stand up, as always, and represent the fine constituents of Niagara West—Glanbrook.

I must confess that I was lost in conversation about a very important issue regarding the school closures that this government has failed to cease, which is also an issue we need to talk about when it comes to youth. I think education is something that, obviously—

Interjections.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: Keeping children safe and the—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I need to remind the member that he needs to refer back to the bill.

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: All right. I appreciate the comments from the members opposite, and I would appreciate if they kept them also professional.

The reality is that, as we look at the Child and Family Services Act, for many years—we see now that it is 32 years old. Changes to ensure our most vulnerable children are protected and to provide the best service possible—it's long overdue to ensure we reach that.

Children deserve a safe and loving home which respects them as individuals. We support giving children rights and a voice in their future. The reality is that we need to support the integrity and the autonomy of the family, and take the least disruptive action possible moving forward. Services to children and young persons should be provided in a manner that respects the children's needs and takes into account the physical, mental, developmental, emotional and spiritual needs as we approach these issues.

I'm pleased that this bill is being brought forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Questions and comments?

Mr. John Vanthof: As always, it's an honour to stand in this House, and today to follow the member from Prince Edward—Hastings and his remarks on Bill 89. I do only have a couple of minutes, and I didn't hear the first part of his remarks but, as always, he was focusing on local people in his riding, as we all try to do.

Specifically, on Bill 89, it has to do with the children's aid societies. The people who work with kids and work with families who are under stress play a huge, very important role in our society. By far, the vast, vast majority do incredible work. But the reason we have to have strong regulations is to protect on the very rare occasions that that doesn't happen.

Some of this bill takes work from our member from Hamilton Mountain, who introduced Katelynn's Principle. We all know the story of what happened to that young girl and how she perished while under the care of a children's aid society. Many things in this bill look into that, and there are many issues of this bill that we support. Many issues here in this House are very partisan; this one isn't. With this one, we are all working together to try to make sure that the most vulnerable in our society are always protected.

I personally take a bit of offence when I hear words like, "That's why the Wynne government is working so hard on this issue." I think everyone is working incredibly hard on this issue. This isn't one to take political points on. I take offence to that. This one is for making sure that we protect those who can't protect themselves.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return to the member from Prince Edward—Hastings to wrap up.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you to the members of the Legislature who have provided some remarks on Bill 89:

the members from Oshawa, Richmond Hill, Niagara West–Glanbrook and Timiskaming–Cochrane.

I would tend to agree with the member from Timiskaming–Cochrane. I know this is a very important issue for everyone on the PC bench, as it is on the NDP bench and with the Liberals as well. It's a bill that is long overdue, as many of us have mentioned throughout the course of this debate. It's been 32 years since it was last updated, so many, many things have changed over that time.

It isn't a partisan issue. Many of the members of the Legislature have brought forward little chunks of what Bill 89 contains, whether it was the member from Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry who brought forward private member's legislation—and previously, the former member from Barrie, Rod Jackson, brought forward a bill. I know the member from Hamilton Mountain, from the NDP, has been a tremendous advocate for protecting our most vulnerable in our communities, as has our critic Sylvia Jones from Dufferin–Caledon, and now the current critic, Gila Martow from Thornhill. They've all done great work, as many members on the other side of the House have as well, in making sure that the most vulnerable people in our community, our youngest children in care, get the services that they require, but also that it's done in a safe and respectful environment for these kids.

That's why it's so imperative that a bill like Bill 89 gets updated after 32 years. It shouldn't take 32 years, Madam Speaker. It should be updated far more often than that. There are many, many items in Bill 89. It's a thick document—270 pages, I think. There will be some very thoughtful amendments put forward when this eventually does get to committee.

I thank you for your time this morning and I must say, I love your glasses, Madam Speaker. They're excellent.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. Further debate?

Hon. Reza Moridi: It's a pleasure to rise again in this House and speak to Bill 89, the Child, Youth and Family Services Act.

Madam Speaker, as I indicated earlier, youth and children are the greatest assets of our country, our province of Ontario. They are the future of this nation. Our government is committed to doing everything we possibly can to make sure that our children have a better start in their lives.

The proposed legislation, if passed, will strengthen the minister's ability to hold children's aid societies accountable for the services they provide to our children. It will also strengthen their ability to hold CASSs, children's aid societies, accountable for the public funds they manage.

It also supports First Nations, Métis and Inuit children, youth and families through the delivery of culturally appropriate supports that respect indigenous traditions, cultures and heritage.

In the past, the opposition members all have spoken in support of this bill. I'm just going to quote a few members.

1000

The member from Thornhill said, "I want to summarize a bit by saying that the PC caucus and I intend to support Bill 89, but we're looking forward to proposing some amendments in the committee and hearing all of the input from the communities."

Also, the member from Hamilton Mountain said, "We welcome these changes that are being incorporated. We're thrilled to see Katelynn's Principle reflected. We're thrilled to see Jordan's Principle reflected. We are thrilled to see the work of youth, through the child advocate's office, that is being incorporated into this bill here before us."

Also, the member from Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound said, "I want to ensure that this legislation goes forward, that it goes to committee and that we focus on the rights and needs of the children, and the wishes of the child."

Finally, the member from Timmins–James Bay said, "This bill has got to go to committee. There's a lot of good in this bill."

Madam Speaker, as you know, this bill has seen more than nine hours of debate in this House and many members have already spoken to this bill in this Legislature. However, at this point, much of the conversation and debate are just repeating points already made by members. So it's time that the bill be put to a vote for second reading and hopefully be referred to committee for further conversation and discussion. As a result, I move that the question be now put.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Moridi has moved that the question now be put. I understand from the Clerk that more than nine hours of debate have occurred on this particular bill. I'm satisfied that there has been sufficient debate to allow this question to be put to the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour of the motion that the question now be put, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion that the question now be put, please say "nay."

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

A recorded vote will be required. This will be deferred until after question period today.

Vote deferred.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Orders of the day? I recognize the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

Hon. Michael Coteau: No further business, Madam Chair.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. The House will now be recessed until 10:30.

The House recessed from 1003 to 1030.

INTRODUCTION OF VISITORS

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: First and foremost, I would like to recognize five of the students at École secondaire catholique Pierre-Savard from my constituency: Magalie

Kayrouz, Mariette René, Lindsey Alcy, Lise Simb and, of course, my former summer student and hopefully future summer student, Michel Hajjar. It's good to see you.

I also have in the gallery with me today my 11-year-old daughter, Victoria. As many of you know, she arrived here when I first arrived. She's 11 years, and I've got 11 years here. She wanted to come here for her birthday, as she does every year. She'll be turning 12 next week. What I wanted to say is that I spent most of the week with Daughters of the Vote on Parliament Hill, and it was one of the most incredible experiences of my life. She had the opportunity to go to Parliament Hill yesterday and instead decided she wanted to come here to the Ontario Legislature because she really likes you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): What a great save that was. The member from Timmons–James Bay.

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Before I do my introductions, I just want to say that I had the pleasure of being taught mathematics by a future Tory member over here. That was fun earlier this morning, but I was rebounded because my colleague Jennifer French then taught a lesson back. Who says New Democrats can't teach a Tory old tricks?

Comme on le voit dans les estrades, on a nos amis d'à travers la province, de nos écoles secondaires. Ils sont ici avec nous autres pour le Parlement des jeunes. De la part du NPD et de notre chef, M^{me} Horwath, on vous dit bienvenue ici à Queen's Park.

Hon. Chris Ballard: I'd like to welcome Charlotte Bouthillette, a youth from my riding who is attending the francophone youth Parliament reception. Welcome to Queen's Park.

M^{me} Gila Martow: J'aimerais accueillir les étudiants du Parlement des jeunes. Hier, on a chanté, à une réception, le nouvel hymne des Franco-Ontariens et Franco-Ontariennes : Notre Place. Merci beaucoup et bienvenue.

Miss Monique Taylor: I would also like to welcome some youth who are here for the francophone youth parliamentarian reception. We have Ibrahim Oleiche and Luke MacDonald, both from Hamilton Mountain, and from Hamilton Centre we have Fatima Haggar. Welcome to Queen's Park.

L'hon. Yasir Naqvi: Aujourd'hui nous avons en Chambre : Reed Victoria, Alice Congera, Katie Bolger, Jennica Thomas, Lydia Philippe, Aline Ahouzi, Sanayah Zéphir, Carlie Angelle Pierre, Yasmine Zemni, Clémence Thabet, Mathew Casey-Juarez et Fèmi-Joëlle Dadjo de la grande circonscription d'Ottawa-Centre et Ottawa-Orléans. Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

Mr. Michael Harris: I'd like to welcome Stephen Kropf from New Dundee in the region of Waterloo. Welcome to Queen's Park.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: I'd also like to welcome the participants for the francophone model Parliament. I have three students from London–Fanshawe, so please

everyone help me welcome Laël Addis Mikwete Nobantu, Abigail Twaites and Bianelle Sylvain Allard.

Hon. Helena Jaczek: I'd like to welcome to Queen's Park this morning a 30-year veteran of the Ontario public service with the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change, the new president of the Professional Engineers Government of Ontario and a constituent from my riding, Scott Grant; as well as PEGO director George Collins.

Ms. Sylvia Jones: Please join me in welcoming Dr. Stephen Milone. He is the proud dad of our page Benjamin. Welcome to Queen's Park.

M. Michael Mantha: J'aimerais prendre le temps de souhaiter la bienvenue aux étudiants qui sont ici du Parlement jeunesse, surtout à Emily Fox de Blind River, et, surtout, à tous les participants qui sont du nord de l'Ontario.

M. Shafiq Qaadri: J'ai le plaisir d'accueillir quelques-uns de mes invités.

I'm honoured to welcome guests and the family of page captain Prey Patel, who is standing next to me now: his father—and please do rise—Mr. Kanaiyalal Patel; mother, Mrs. Surekhaben Patel; sister Anal Patel; accompanied ably by their teacher Mrs. Colleen Hull.

Mr. Jim McDonell: I would like to welcome, from the francophone model Parliament, Valérie Chevrier from my riding, from École secondaire catholique La Citadelle.

M. John Vanthof: Il me fait plaisir d'introduire Daphnée Veilleux-Michaud, Alexa Leduc, puis Jazmyn Labelle du Parlement francophone.

Hon. Dipika Damerla: I want to introduce a constituent, Benedicte Tshiama, from ESC Sainte-Famille, who is here with the francophone youth Parliament. Bienvenue à Queen's Park.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I too would like to welcome Breanna Wilson and Patrick Bethune from École secondaire catholique Algonquin in North Bay.

Hon. Reza Moridi: Please join me in welcoming my colleague Charlene Baptist from my office at the ministry. She's visiting the House today.

Ms. Sophie Kiwala: I would like to extend a very warm welcome to Mary Ellen Gucciardi in the members' east gallery; Jaclynne Hamel, one of my EAs; and Rosa Gutierrez, my parliamentary assistant.

Un grand accueil chaleureux à Alexandra Allain et Nathan Feuillat, de Mille-Îles à Kingston, Ontario.

Hon. Charles Sousa: I'd like to welcome to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario today Gabriela Cavaco, who is the chief representative of Banco Santander Totta here in Toronto. She's joined by her colleagues Mr. António Carneiro, a director of the international division, and Mr. Pedro Fialho, also a director of the international division.

Bem-vindos ao Ontário e à Assembleia do Ontário.

Ms. Jennifer K. French: I am also pleased to welcome to the Legislature for le Parlement jeunesse franco-ontarien Mélodie Ouellette, who lives in Courtice and goes to school in Whitby, so who is sort of from Oshawa.

M. Grant Crack: Il me fait un grand plaisir de souhaiter la bienvenue aux étudiants de ma circonscription de Glengarry–Prescott–Russell: Trevor Stewart, Mireille Latulippe, Philippe Desforges, Mélodie Dubuc, Fadia Duquette, et Jean-Simon Brassard. Bienvenue à tous.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I too would like to join members of the Legislature in welcoming all of the students from the francophone model Parliament who are here today. We met last night and they're an enthusiastic bunch of students.

Hon. Chris Ballard: On behalf of the Minister of Transportation, I'd like to welcome Rosa Campione. Rosa is the mother of Elizabeth-Anne Campione, a legislative page from Vaughan.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further introductions?

Just one comment for our model Parliament students and for the members themselves: I want to give a very strong shout-out and thank you to the staff here at the Legislature who put the program together. Thank you very much.

ORAL QUESTIONS

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Patrick Brown: My question is for the Premier. While the Liberal government is in the mood for acknowledging their mistakes, I have a suggestion: They can acknowledge another one. That mistake would be the fact that this government refuses to make the cost of cap-and-trade visible on natural gas bills. Will the Premier announce that that mistake is going to be corrected today?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Once again, I'm please to rise and acknowledge the work that this government is doing to address climate change. The action of us doing nothing would have been catastrophic. That's why it's this government that acted. We brought forward cap-and-trade and our climate change action plan.

1040

As the Leader of the Opposition well knows, Mr. Speaker, the decision to put cap-and-trade onto the bills within natural gas was a decision that was made by the Ontario Energy Board. They did consultation after consultation. They talked with the industry stakeholders, and they said that this was a cost of doing business. That cost will not be a part of the conversation as they move forward. But this was an OEB decision.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Back to the Premier: The reason this Liberal government does not want to admit this mistake is that they want to cover up and hide the fact that this is a cash grab.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member has to withdraw.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Withdraw.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Carry on.

Mr. Patrick Brown: The government is trying to hide this cash grab—\$1.9 billion a year—to pander to voters, not to help the environment; not to make a real difference. If it was anything more than a cash grab, they would be open and transparent about it. This is a Premier who promised she would be open and transparent, and this is the exact opposite.

So my question, Mr. Speaker, directly to the Premier: In the spirit of being open and transparent, will you do the right thing? Will you make sure that this cost is very visible and the government no longer hides it?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Minister of the Environment and Climate Change.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I really enjoy the Leader of the Opposition, the man with no plan. He has no plan to reduce electricity by 25%. He won't support us. But he does have a plan, Mr. Speaker, on climate change, and we're so excited about it. He wants to introduce a carbon tax, a carbon tax that wouldn't put three cents on natural gas; it would put over 12 cents. It's a carbon tax that wouldn't put four cents on propane; it would put it at 10 cents, just like BC. He would put not four cents on gasoline but 16 cents on gasoline.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please.

I want to make this clear—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): —so I'll wait. Let me be perfectly clear. I was quite prepared to call the member to order simply because the members on his own side were making enough noise that I could not hear. That has been going on since we started question period, on both sides.

You now know that I'm paying attention. I'm asking that you let us get through this question period with a reasonable amount of decorum between each other and for each other, particularly on the government side. When someone's answering a question, I'm hearing heckling from the same side. I'm also hearing heckling from the opposition.

Please finish.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, back to the Premier: Once again, the minister is simply making it up. This is a cash grab, and the government is trying to hide it.

Lorrie Goldstein pointed out, "Once Ontario joins the California/Quebec cap-and-trade market next year, all bets are off." Only 18% of the permits were sold last month, in terms of the latest auction.

Mr. Speaker, how much money will taxpayers be on the hook for because of this disastrous cap-and-trade?

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, let me just finish, because he keeps on telling us—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thought I was being reasonable, so let's go. The member from Leeds–Grenville, come to order. And I think there were two others, but I wasn't quite sure which one it was.

Carry on.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition keeps on telling us that he likes this BC carbon tax model, which would add not five cents on diesel, as our lower-cost system would, but almost 20 cents. That, as he said, would make him the best leader Michigan ever had, to use his words. He—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All right. The member from Leeds–Grenville, second time. And a few of you—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): —the member from Simcoe–Grey—are pushing me to warnings.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: To come anywhere near—and those are numbers at 20, 30, 40 or 50, under the federal government's cap. That's the minimum amount, Mr. Speaker, that would be required. So if he isn't using the BC model, which costs four times as much as the Ontario model, just what is his position?

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Since the Minister of Education ran away from Allison Jones when she was asked this question, maybe the Premier will answer it for us. I'll give the Premier this opportunity. Mr. Speaker, very clearly, how many Ontario schools are under the threat of closure? Will the Premier please answer?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: We know that when it comes to pupil accommodation reviews and school consolidations, those are very tough decisions that school boards have to make. That's in fact why we've put a process in place where they need to consult with municipalities, consult with their local communities. What's important to know is that these are locally elected officials in their communities who are making these very difficult decisions. It's important that we get that information from those local communities, and that's exactly what we have done, Speaker, so that when we're talking about school consolidations we know that these are decisions that are tough for local decision makers and that we're getting that information straight from them. And that's exactly what we're doing.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question again will be to the Premier. On Tuesday, the minister said it's not about the number of schools. She wouldn't give an arbitrary number. That's great, because nobody wanted an arbitrary number; they wanted a real number. So I'll try again, Mr. Speaker: How many schools are under the threat of closure? Is it as high as the 600 schools the minister previously identified? When will we get a real answer from this government? Will the Premier please answer?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Mr. Speaker, let's look at the facts. We have pupil accommodation reviews that are happening across the province. There are 43 of those that

are happening. We know these are very difficult conversations for locally elected school boards to have with their communities. Of that, there are 300 schools that are involved in those very difficult decisions. In the 2016-17 school year, through this very difficult process, we have seen boards decide to close 19 schools. It's important that we respect the role of the locally elected school boards as they are leading this process in their communities together with their municipalities, with parents and with communities. We know that these are very tough decisions for our boards.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier: Our Lady of Peace in Vaughan, in Maple, is 97% full, both English and French immersion stream—very popular school. But because of this government's pupil accommodation review, this government's priorities will close its doors. It's going to close. This school will close in June. The Liberals have made up their mind with Our Lady of Peace and signalled there's going to be a closure.

There's an opportunity here. There is an opportunity to put in a moratorium. I was disappointed that the Liberal members voted against our moratorium yesterday, but there's an opportunity for the government to take ownership of this and say, "No more school closures, and we will support the moratorium."

So my question to the Premier is, can she do the right thing and stop closing schools left, right and centre across the province of Ontario? Our students deserve better. Our communities deserve better.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Be seated, please. Thank you.

Minister?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: You know, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition talks about what is happening in local communities, and I want to say that we have actually invested \$16 billion in school capital infrastructure, building 810 new schools and 780 expansions, or changing the configuration of a school. We're doing that to ensure that our students in Ontario receive the best education possible.

Of that number, 450 new schools are in rural communities, with \$1.1 billion in capital that we're investing. As we talk about what is happening in rural communities, it's important that we look at the fact that, yes, there are difficult conversations happening in terms of reviewing the accommodation needs in schools, and there are also conversations happening about the investments that we're making in those local communities and building up and strengthening our communities.

1050

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday was International Women's Day. Because of

systemic inequality, we all know that women are disproportionately affected by skyrocketing hydro bills—women like Valentina, who lives in Brantford. She says what keeps her up at night is not knowing when hydro bills are going to increase again. The Premier's plan is nothing more than a band-aid. It offers no comfort to women, like Valentina, who can't save for their kids' futures because they don't know when hydro bills are going to go up again.

When will this Premier understand that her plan is nothing more than a plan to help bankers instead of helping the everyday people of Ontario, people like Valentina, who need a permanent solution that will actually keep hydro bills down?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: I know that the Minister of Energy is just raring to answer the supplementary question.

I want to just say to the member opposite that it was International Women's Day yesterday. I hope that he had an opportunity to see the announcement that we made in the morning about levelling the playing field for women in sports, because it is extremely important, as we know. Some 94% of women executives say that they competed in sport and it made a difference to them in their career trajectory. The announcement we made will mean that provincial sport organizations will be required to have equity policies in place. We're putting money into training women coaches. It's a very important initiative in terms of levelling the playing field for women in sport in Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Sharon is a senior who lives in Sault Ste. Marie. The Premier and this government have heard Sharon's story before. She lives in only one room of her apartment because she can't afford the peak time-of-use fees to keep the heat on during the day in her apartment. Since the Premier claims that her plan is designed to help women like Sharon, why didn't she put an end to the unfair, mandatory time-of-use fees that leave Sharon suffering at home in the cold?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Chief government whip, second time.

Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Our plan will reduce those bills by 25%. Specifically in Sault Ste. Marie and area, if those folks live on the outskirts, if they're a Hydro One customer, if they're an Algoma Power customer, they are going to see their bills reduced between 40% and 50%.

But it's not only Sault Ste. Marie that is going to see the benefits; it's right across the province. Yesterday, when I was in Hamilton—the mayor of Hamilton, Fred Eisenberger, was in the news yesterday talking about our hydro plan. Do you know what he said, Mr. Speaker? Our government's plan to reduce our bills by 25% is "a very positive step" for their city's hydro customers. He credited our government with listening to Ontarians and implementing what he calls "dramatic" reductions.

The party on that side has put together a proposal—*Interjections.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, please.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I know their proposal is nothing—*Interjections.*

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, please—wrap up.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: It's nothing more than wishful thinking on that side.

We're putting in place a plan that offers significant relief for all Ontarians.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Jagmeet Singh: Mr. Speaker, women across this province are suffering under the weight of skyrocketing hydro bills—women like Valentina, Sharon, and Mehru Malik, a small business owner in Sarnia. Mehru had to leave behind her family in Brampton, her husband and children, because the cost of high hydro bills meant that she had to lay off many of her workers. Now she lives in Sarnia, and that means that she only gets to see her family on weekends, if she's lucky.

These women and their families expected more from this Premier and this government than the desperate band-aid fix that they revealed last week.

When will the Premier stop putting bankers and well-connected insiders ahead of everyday people and the women of this province, and put forward a plan that actually puts them and their families first?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: All people within this province, Mr. Speaker, are going to see that 25% reduction. Small businesses, as well, are going to see that savings. That's how widely we acted, because we heard from Ontarians that they wanted more relief.

We brought forward the 8% reduction, but we heard that people needed more. So we acted, and we brought forward a 25% reduction.

Their plan, Mr. Speaker, does nothing. It does absolutely nothing to help the women that he mentioned. Our plan will. It helps them in small businesses. It reduces their bills by 25%. It reduces their home bills by 25%. What they're talking about is not even saving a single cent. Their plan doesn't even mention low-income and vulnerable people until the last page, and they're saying, "Wait." We're saying we're going to act by summer.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Paul Miller: My question is to the Premier. Yesterday, freedom-of-information documents revealed that the Premier knows that she is closing schools at full capacity, based on a failed Mike Harris funding formula. Since 2011, the Liberal government has closed more than 277 schools.

Can the Premier please tell the moms and the dads out there which of these 277 schools were operating at full capacity when they were closed?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Education.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I want to thank the member opposite for this question, because the very reason why schools are doing accommodation reviews is so that they can review and look at those facts, including the utilization of schools, the definition of boundaries for schools and to ensure that they are making the best possible decision on behalf of students in their local communities. That's exactly the work that the school boards are doing in these reviews, and that's why we have to ensure that they have an opportunity to have this very difficult but meaningful conversation with their local communities, receiving input from municipalities and working together with their local boards.

We've sent a letter just this week, the Minister of Infrastructure and I, asking them to continue those conversations, because they are important to the decisions of the future of their schools.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: Speaker, let me narrow this down a bit. There have been more than 20 schools closed by the Liberal government in my community of Hamilton since 2011. Some of them are Crestwood, Eastmount Park, King George—and can you imagine?—Sir John A. Macdonald and Linden Park. Can the Premier tell Hamiltonians which of these schools were closed while operating at full capacity?

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: I actually just said in response to the question that came forward from the opposition that we've actually invested in 810 new schools in this province and 780 expansions or renovations: more than \$16 billion in capital infrastructure invested in our schools. We're continuing to make these investments.

Just a few months ago I was in Hamilton, and it's a great example of two school boards coming together to make the best decision on behalf of their schools—the French Catholic school board and the French public school board—to build one new school that will in fact have a community use and it will also serve the needs of French high school students in Hamilton. We are making these investments in local communities because they are in the best interests of our students.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Final supplementary?

Mr. Paul Miller: Schools play an important role in Hamilton and everywhere else in the province. They support neighbourhoods. They bring communities together. Parents in Hamilton are absolutely furious to learn that the Premier has been closing schools that are full. They are furious that the government modernization plan runs contrary to the stated community hub plan—and they know it. No one's fooling anyone here.

Here are a couple more for you: Prince Philip, Roxborough Park, St. Thomas—and I could go on and on. Can the Premier tell parents in my community and across this province how many of these schools were operating at full capacity when they were closed? We want some details.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Mr. Speaker, it's important that we look at what the facts are and what is happening,

because I just mentioned to the member that 810 new schools were built, and in addition, 780 extensions and renovations. When a school board is doing—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Finish, please.

1100

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: When an accommodation review is happening, it's really meant for the school board to gather that feedback in terms of the utilization, the condition of the building—

Hon. Jeff Leal: Mayor Eisenberger wants to know.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: In fact, maybe a conversation like what happened in Peterborough, where we had two smaller schools that came together—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): There are a few people who know what I'm doing.

Carry on.

Hon. Mitzie Hunter: Thanks, Mr. Speaker—like the example in Peterborough, where Minister Leal and I had an opportunity to announce \$13 million to build a brand new elementary school, with new facilities that will offer the best education—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you. New question.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you, Speaker, and good morning. My question this morning is for the Minister of Energy.

Last week I asked you, Minister, about the electricity increases—15% last year alone—at Quinte Health Care hospitals. Your announcement last week won't actually roll back any of that. It barely addresses the increased cost of electricity going forward this year. What the minister did was side with his big Liberal donors in his energy scheme last year, instead of siding with the doctors and the staff and the patients at Quinte Health Care hospitals.

My question is this: How many billions of dollars in interest is the scheme that you announced last week going to cost electricity customers in the future?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: It's very obvious that they don't have a plan, so they're making it up as they go.

I know last week the honourable member put out a tweet that he had to correct on air, when he said that what we were saying in that is inaccurate, just like the question—inaccurate information in it.

We're making sure that all people in this province see a 25% reduction. Hospitals: Because of the structural changes that we are making to the system, they will see a reduction of between 2% and 4%. That's significant. But hospitals also qualify for many of our programs; the saveONenergy program, for example. My hospital in greater Sudbury saved \$400,000 a year by investing in the saveONenergy program and they put that back into health care.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Todd Smith: The price of electricity at Quinte Health Care hospitals has gone up 34% since 2012. That is accurate.

The minister had plenty of taxpayer money to throw around last week to bail out his government's bad decisions that they've made on the energy file. And let's call it what it is: A bailout is a bailout, and this bailout is trying to save the Liberal hide in the next election. He didn't have a dime last week, however, for the patients and the doctors and the staff at Quinte Health Care hospitals.

I ask the minister again: How many billions of dollars in interest is his scheme that he announced last week going to cost electricity customers of Ontario in the future—how many billions of dollars?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: We're saving Ontario ratepayers 25% on all of their bills. The only person who doesn't understand about the billions they're going to cost is, again, that party. They talk about ripping up contracts. I know the honourable member recognizes that they can't do that because it will cost them billions—because they don't have a plan.

We have a plan, Mr. Speaker. We're bringing it forward. We're helping businesses; we're helping municipalities; we're helping ratepayers. We're making sure that everyone in this province will see a reduction on their electricity bills.

I know they don't have a plan. The only thing they want to do is put a carbon tax on and then tax everything when they bring back coal.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Sarah Campbell: My question is to the Premier. The Nickel Lake Lumber sawmill employs 25 people near Fort Frances. It has seen its hydro bills jump 50% in the last few years.

Mr. Kendall Lundy, the owner, tells me he has "just about had it" and that "everyone's jobs are in jeopardy." His competitors in Minnesota have hydro bills that are half of what he pays. What's worse is that he is subsidizing cheap hydro exports to these competitors—costing ratepayers like Mr. Lundy billions of dollars each year.

Why does the Premier's hydro plan have no solution at all to rein in these wasteful hydro exports and reduce overall hydro costs?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm pleased to rise to talk about the importance of our forestry sector and of course how important energy is to our forestry sector. I know the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry will want to comment as well.

For us in northern Ontario, we recognize that our large industry plays a very important role, not only in our northern economy but in the economy of Ontario and of Canada. That's why, thanks to this government, for northern Ontario we brought forward the NIER Program—the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Pro-

gram—which is helping every forestry company within all of northern Ontario. That's why we're so pleased to see that our forestry companies and their energy costs are one of the lowest—not only in Ontario, not only in Canada, but in all of North—

Mr. Gilles Bisson: What? What are you smoking?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member from Timmins–James Bay will come to order, and he's about that far away from having to withdraw. He knows I'm not happy.

Carry on.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I know the company in Thunder Bay, Resolute—they're talking about how their energy costs are some of the lowest in their entire fleet in North America.

We're going to continue to work with our forestry sector and with our mining sector to ensure that they remain as competitive as possible with the lowest possible prices.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Ms. Sarah Campbell: Here's the thing: The Premier's hydro plan does next to nothing to help medium-sized businesses like Nickel Lake Lumber. The sawmill is too big to receive the 8% hydro rebate and, as far as we can tell, it also won't receive the 17% in bill reductions that the Premier has promised for small businesses. But it is not big enough to have the capacity to participate in the expanded industrial conservation initiative.

The NDP's plan would reduce hydro bills for all ratepayers, including medium-sized businesses like the Nickel Lake Lumber sawmill.

Why does the Premier's plan exclude medium-sized businesses from the 25% in savings she has promised?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I encourage the third party to read our plan, because medium-sized businesses will qualify under our new expansion of the ICI program. We've lowered the threshold to 500 kilowatts. We would encourage them to look at the plan.

But when talking about the forestry sector—I've got a letter here from Tembec, a very prominent forestry company. Let me quote: "Tembec is able to effectively manage our electricity cost exposure in Ontario through our participation in a variety of programs. As a result, electricity costs at the Tembec ... newsprint operations are comparable to our operations in other jurisdictions" and with other competitors.

We recognize the importance of the forestry sector, of the mining sector, of our resource sector.

That's what we're doing: bringing rates down with programs like the NIER Program, which is helping all of our industry.

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: Ma question est aussi pour le ministre de l'Énergie, the Honourable Glenn Thibeault.

Firstly, I'd like to thank the Minister of Energy, along with my colleagues the MPP for Etobicoke–Lakeshore, Minister Albanese and Minister Sousa, for joining us for

a lively question-and-answer session with the multi-cultural press of Ontario. That announcement of the government's energy plan generated an extraordinary amount of excitement—the 25% reduction of hydro bills for all Ontarians, otherwise known as Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan.

Speaker, as you can imagine, such significant savings for household costs is an initiative not just for today, but for a sustainable program going forward.

In my own district, the exceptional riding of Etobicoke North, we are blessed by a huge number of condominiums. Minister, I ask you, how will my condo residents benefit from the government's announcement of this 25% reduction in hydro costs?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I want to thank the member for Etobicoke North for that important question and also for all of his work on this file. He and I were together the other night talking to constituents about this.

1110

Ensuring that all Ontario households receive this benefit is important to me and to this government, Mr. Speaker, so I think it's important that we clarify. If you pay an electricity bill for your residence, you will receive this benefit, regardless of whether you live in a house, a condo or an apartment. In fact, if your condo has facility costs that are shared among the residents, these shared electricity costs will also be receiving this reduction.

This is an essential part of our plan to increase the fairness of our electricity system in Ontario. That's why not only will you see your bill reduced, but costs will be held to inflation for at least the next four years. We are proud of Ontario's Fair Hydro Plan and the significant, lasting relief it will provide.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: I begin, Speaker, by thanking the minister not only for this program and his stewardship resulting in this 25% reduction of Ontario's hydro costs, but also physically criss-crossing Ontario to explain the details to Ontarians.

Speaker, as you'll appreciate, after decades of neglect of our electricity system—yes, by parties of all stripes—it is heartening now to see that the government is taking steps to secure an energy future that is clean, reliable, and most importantly, affordable to all.

I know that the 25% reduction in hydro bills applies to every one of the more than four million households in Ontario. This is especially welcome in my own area of Etobicoke North.

The minister has previously mentioned that many small businesses, as well as farms, will benefit from that reduction as well, and I understand there are even more groups that will qualify. My question is this: Will the minister please share with the House how this announcement will benefit other sectors of our economy?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Again, I want to thank the member for this question and the opportunity to clarify this important point, Mr. Speaker. The 25% reduction through the fair hydro plan will not only apply to households, but to many other small ratepayers, as well. This

includes hundreds of thousands of small businesses; the vast majority of farms, which I know the Minister of Agriculture works with day in and day out; small offices of all kinds, including non-profits and charities; retirement homes; long-term-care homes; housing co-ops; community agencies; those on retail contracts or with sub-meters; and more and more will qualify for this rebate.

The simplest thing to remember is, if your bill includes the time-of-use prices, you will be receiving the full benefits of this plan. This is going to mean major savings for these cross-sections of Ontario, and we're happy to be implementing a plan.

DIGITAL GOVERNMENT

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My question is to the Deputy Premier.

Deputy Premier, in June 2016, your government opened up applications for a chief digital officer, a government executive whose job it would be to make life easier for people through easy-to-use online services and programs. However, it seems that this government doesn't want to actually make life easier for people, because eight months have gone by and this chief digital officer is nowhere to be seen. Once again, the Liberals talk the talk, but won't walk the walk.

When will the Deputy Premier, as minister responsible for digital government, get back to work and find a chief digital officer so that Ontarians can access the services and programs they deserve?

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Deputy Premier and minister responsible for digital government.

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I want to say thank you to the member. This is the first question I have ever received as the minister responsible for digital government, so thank you for paying attention.

Digital government is all about providing services for the public that are faster, that are easier, that are simpler and that cost government less money. We are absolutely committed to moving forward on our digital strategy. Hiring a chief digital officer is very much part of that.

I will ask the member to be a little bit patient, because this is an important job that we are hoping to fill very soon.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: My question is back to the Deputy Premier. Ontarians have seen the result of this Liberal government's bungling in digitization before. This government simply can't be trusted to get the job done. Let's look at the facts: eHealth was an \$8-billion scandal and the rollout of the Social Assistance Management System, or SAMS, was a disaster.

Now the government has been putting forward CPIN, the Child Protection Information Network, a cumbersome system that won't even have a searchable database. Consulting costs alone on CPIN have cost tens of millions. What will the Deputy Premier do to ensure this government delivers a digital system that is actually a

service to the people of Ontario, instead of another expensive boondoggle?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: There are many initiatives that are already under way when it comes to digital government, and I have to say I'm enormously proud of our digital government team in Ontario; they're doing excellent work.

One example of this, and one that I hope that all of the members in this House have actually taken advantage of, is the new OSAP calculator. This is a tool that allows people—students, elementary school students, their parents, high school students—to actually understand how generous and transparent our student assistance program now is. What it means is that hundreds of thousands of students in this province will have access to education because they have the ability, they've earned the right and they've been admitted—but free tuition for over 200,000 Ontario students, and more generous support. Having that calculator available so that people know up front how much aid they can expect is a big, big step forward.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Cindy Forster: My question is to the Premier. My office has been flooded with complaints around skyrocketing hydro bills, from people like Lorna Lampman. Lorna has lived in St. Catharines—the whip may know her—for 30 years, and she says she's never in her life seen a hydro bill so high. Her bills have tripled over the last few years. Her last hydro bill was \$600. Lorna is in her early fifties. She has a decent job, but her husband is on a disability pension and they find themselves having to choose between whether they can put some money away for retirement or whether they're going to pay that hydro bill.

Why is the Premier choosing to put \$40 billion in the pockets of bankers and ignore the very people, like Lorna Lampman, who need our help most?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Energy.

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: Thank you for the question.

It is important that we acted to ensure that we're helping people, like the honourable member has mentioned. That's why the fair hydro plan, the single largest electricity rate reduction in Ontario's history, will be providing a 25% reduction for that family and for all families across the province.

While I don't know the specifics of that individual family, the Ontario Electricity Support Program is there to help those types of families. And we also increased the OESP program by 50% and increased it so that more families and more individuals will qualify. The OESP program is there to help, and on top of that, we created the affordability fund. The affordability fund will actually help them, through their utility, to make their home more energy-conserving, to actually reduce their bills.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Cindy Forster: I'm not sure that the minister understands, because Lorna doesn't want this pushed on to her children and her grandchildren.

It's not just people like Lorna who are worried about retirement who I'm hearing from, and who are struggling to pay their bills. I also recently heard from a young student in my riding who suffers from a disability. She expects to graduate soon. She worries about her student loans and the interest that she's going to have to pay when she's finished her studies. She, too, is finding that choice: Do I put some money away for my student loan payments, or do I pay the ever-rising hydro bills?

Why is the Premier continuing to support wealthy bankers instead of the very students and people trying to retire in this province?

Hon. Glenn Thibeault: I'm pleased to say that that individual student will also qualify for the 25% reduction. On top of that, by the great work by the Deputy Premier and her ministry, all students moving forward are going to get free tuition as well—and that's fantastic. Not only are we providing free tuition, but we're working with folks right across the province to help them reduce their bills.

Yesterday, as I mentioned, I was in Hamilton. The mayor isn't the only Hamiltonian that is excited about our plan. At Alectra, they're talking about how the homeowners in Hamilton will see more than 25% savings. The folks in Hamilton will see between 27% and 28% reductions because of our fair hydro plan. That's a significant savings for families and small businesses, and that's something I do hope that the opposition will support, because it is helping all families right across the province.

1120

ENERGY POLICIES

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure.

Minister, folks in rural Ontario are industrious, hard-working people who pay their taxes, put food on their table, put their kids through school and take care of elderly relatives. Like all other Ontarians, they are looking to get ahead and want our government to make life easier and more affordable.

That is why I was excited that the minister recently announced a new natural gas grant, which will help communities like the ones in my riding switch to more cost-effective fuel sources. Spending less money on heating their homes means more money available for their kids' education, for essential home improvements or to tuck away in an RRSP.

Speaker, through you to the minister: Could he please explain how the newly announced Natural Gas Grant Program will benefit my constituents?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: I thank the member for the question.

At ROMA, I was proud to announce that we are investing \$100 million to expand natural gas to underserved rural communities. This will go a long way toward making energy consumption more affordable for rural Ontarians, and it will leverage hundreds of millions of dollars of investment from natural gas distribution

companies. Rural Ontario will have more access, affordability and choice, and greater opportunities for economic development.

Access to natural gas infrastructure in rural, remote and indigenous communities is a priority for this government. Natural gas expansion could save consumers up to \$1,500 in heating costs every year.

The intake for this program will begin this spring.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: My thanks to the minister for his response.

Minister, saving \$1,500 a year would be a huge win for farmers and rural families. Providing access, affordability and choice to rural energy consumers is something our government is focusing on. It will support economic development in our rural communities, and that is something of which I'm very proud.

This grant program is fully compatible with the energy board's decision on natural gas expansion in November and, most importantly, will provide meaningful support for our communities.

Speaker, through you to the minister: Could he please explain how this Natural Gas Grant Program compares to the plans put forward by the opposition?

Hon. Bob Chiarelli: That's certainly an excellent question. The fact of the matter is, neither the NDP nor the Tories have ever proposed any policy to expand natural gas access in rural communities.

We are investing \$100 million in this program, in direct response to feedback we received from rural stakeholders, such as the OFA and greenhouse operators. Our investment will leverage hundreds of millions of dollars in private investments.

We're hearing absolutely nothing from the PCs on how they would expand natural gas to rural communities. The Leader of the Opposition has yet to announce a plan, or even a single idea, that would save rural energy consumers so much as one penny. If the Leader of the Opposition is serious about supporting natural gas expansion, then he should get behind our unprecedented initiative and support what we're doing.

SKILLS TRAINING

Mr. Lorne Coe: My question is for the Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development.

The Minister of Advanced Education has been in her role for nearly a year, and during that time, the highly skilled workforce expert panel report was also released.

Why is this government ignoring its own panel's recommendations? And when will this government address the serious skills mismatch that exists in this province?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Thank you to the member opposite for the question.

The highly skilled workforce report, which was prepared by a group led by former member Sean Conway, was presented to the Premier. We are committed to actually moving on every one of the recommendations in that report.

There is a lot of work under way, a lot of discussions. In fact, just yesterday, I had a very good meeting with the Minister of Education and Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters, where we talked about how they could participate in that highly skilled workforce report, particularly around experiential education.

One of the most important recommendations, I think, in that report is that every student, by the time they graduate from high school, and again, when they graduate from university or college, has had one meaningful experiential learning opportunity. That's a big, big shift, and we're committed to achieving that.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Lorne Coe: Back to the Minister of Advanced Education: The Auditor General confirmed that youth unemployment right here in Ontario is hovering at 15%, well above the national average, which is clearly unacceptable.

My question is simple: Does the minister believe that her government's record of high youth unemployment is acceptable? Yes or no?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: Speaker, the answer clearly is no. That's why we're working very, very hard to focus our work on those groups of people who are facing exceptional challenges.

We are listening very carefully to what the Auditor General had to say about making sure that we're actually getting results for the money that we are investing in the programs that support young people as they get into the workforce.

I do just want to remind the member opposite, though, that his party—everybody over there, in the last election—ran on the platform of firing 100,000 people. Those are the very people who support young people who are facing challenges to get through their education and into the workforce. Those cuts would have been disastrous.

We are committed to making sure that every young person in this province achieves their full potential.

LONG-TERM CARE

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: My question is to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. Families contact my office and tell me how worried they are for their loved ones in long-term care. Over the past six months, 86-year-old James Acker has been brutally beaten and sexually assaulted in his long-term-care home. The home has been cited for not protecting residents and staff from assaults, and the same home has received a written warning for not reporting and investigating abuse.

Minister, your record on long-term care is truly disappointing. How many times does James Acker have to be assaulted before you take action?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: Whether it's resident abuse or neglect or violence against staff in a long-term-care home, it's never acceptable. In fact, it's never acceptable in any of our health care environments across this province.

Despite our best efforts, this violence or neglect or abuse, unfortunately and regrettably, from time to time does take place. That's why we've created one of the most rigorous inspection regimes, certainly in Canada and in North America, using the best possible evidence.

I'm proud to say that for this home, as for every single home in this province—for the past two years and entering the third year now, we have inspected 100% of our homes. When we do, and we regrettably find that more work or protection needs to take place, we take it extremely seriously.

I'm happy to follow up in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary.

Ms. Teresa J. Armstrong: Minister, James Acker's family is here today. Tammy Carbino came because you have refused to meet with her. The Canadian Association of Retired Persons also lobbied you to meet with the Acker family, and you have refused.

The Acker family knows that Ontario's long-term-care system is so cash-strapped that resident-on-resident violence is not being fixed, and the one person who can change that is refusing to meet with them.

Minister, will you commit today to fix the problems in long-term-care homes, and to meet face to face with the Acker family?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: As I said, this is an incredibly serious issue that the member opposite has raised. It's regrettable that we should have to have this discussion at all, but it's a reality that we're facing. That's why we're taking a number of measures.

In fact, we've already spoken to, and I look forward to introducing shortly in the Legislature, additional measures that we believe are important to take, not only to reduce and eventually eliminate such violence, whether it be resident-on-resident or whether it be resident-to-staff, but to ensure that those long-term-care homes that need to do more are not only complying with the act, but that we have the tools in place to ensure that that compliance does indeed happen and take place. We take this issue absolutely seriously, and of course, if the family is here—I'm not sure if they're in the gallery. I do see that they are here. I would be happy to have some words with them and speak to them after question period.

1130

AIR-RAIL LINK

Mrs. Cristina Martins: My question is for the Minister of Transportation. When our government announced that we were moving forward with the Union Pearson Express, a dedicated air-rail link between the downtown core and Pearson International Airport, it was clear that this was exactly the type of investment that Toronto needed, both for the city's economy and for the environment.

After going into service, it was very clear that riders loved the UP Express, but it was also clear that the initial ridership levels weren't meeting our expectations. I know that our government was very clear that something

needed to change, and that is why we took action to reduce the fares, an action that many of my constituents in Davenport had called for. I have heard that this course of action has had a huge impact on the uptake of the service.

Can the minister please provide an update on the current status of the Union Pearson Express ridership?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: I want to begin by thanking the member from Davenport not only for the question, but on this particular issue and so many that affect the west end of the GTHA, for her advocacy and for being such a strong champion. She is absolutely correct, Speaker.

She is correct that after its launch, the UP Express ranked very high on customer satisfaction but not high enough on ridership. Today, we are celebrating a very important milestone. One year ago today, our lower fares for the Union Pearson Express came into effect. After lowering the fares, we quickly started to see the ridership grow. I am very pleased to say today that the UP Express ridership has quadrupled, with daily ridership now averaging upwards of 9,000 riders per day.

That's great news for people visiting our city, our region and our province. It's also great news for commuters in the west end of the GTHA, including those who live in the wonderful riding of Davenport.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Thank you to the minister for his answer. I couldn't agree more: Davenport is a wonderful riding.

While certain members of this House jump at the opportunities to criticize our government's investment, it is very clear that it's paying off. Those ridership numbers show a huge increase from what we saw previously, and I have no doubt that they will continue to grow. I know that some days it's been standing room only on the UP Express. I know that since the fares have been reduced, I've heard from many in my community that the UP Express is now a real, affordable option for them. Some members in my community who work at the airport use it daily, while so many others now use it as a way to move between the downtown core and Davenport. This shows the versatility of the service.

Mr. Speaker, will the minister please provide an update on who actually is using the UP Express? Specifically, how many riders are non-airport commuters like the people I have heard from in my community?

Hon. Steven Del Duca: Speaker, I thank the member from Davenport for the follow-up question. She is 100% right.

One thing I didn't mention in my initial answer: In 2016, the Union Pearson Express moved over 2.3 million people between the airport and the city of Toronto, downtown Toronto. Also, interestingly for us to note, one year after lowering those fares, one in every four passengers, roughly 25%, on the UP Express is a regular commuter, taking advantage of the fact that Union Pearson Express fares match existing GO fares on that same corridor.

I couldn't help but notice, when the member from Davenport was asking her follow-up question, members of the NDP caucus were making a lot of noise. I don't know why members in that caucus wouldn't be supportive of more affordable fares, more options for commuters in the west end of Toronto, better transit service—except to say, as is typical for members of that party, they don't have a plan. They don't have a path forward. We do. We're proud of it. We're going to keep building, Speaker.

SERVICES FOR THE DEVELOPMENTALLY DISABLED

Mr. Bill Walker: My question is to the Minister of Community and Social Services. Judson Harnack's 18th birthday was on January 9, but there was no celebration. You see, Judson is severely disabled. He developed a brain tumour at three, suffered a massive stroke at four, and is at the level of a four-year-old, and that will never change.

Sadly, this fact didn't stop the Ministry of Community and Social Services from cutting his supports in half, to \$860 from \$1,900 a month, on his 18th birthday. They also put him on the Passport wait-list, which we all know is a deeply flawed, messy and long wait.

On behalf of Judson and his family, I ask: Will the minister admit that the progress promised on the Passport funding wait-list has been a complete mess and a sham?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: Thank you very much for the question from the member opposite. I'm obviously not able to comment on this specific case, but certainly my ministry and our government does understand the difficulties that families can face, in some cases, where there are very challenging issues related to medical complications for those with developmental disabilities; those, perhaps, with some behavioural issues. These are very difficult and challenging situations for families and for caregivers and so on.

In terms of our Passport waiting list, we are actually ahead of schedule in eliminating wait-lists. We have some 20,000 people now on Passport. There is much more to do, of course; we acknowledge that, but this is a program that is really transforming individual situations.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Bill Walker: Back to the minister: Minister, we have no idea what you've done. You talk about the wait-list action; it's a 2014 wait-list that you're proud to have actually caught up on. This is 2017. At the end of the day, people don't expect a three-year wait-list. They want action and Passport funding when they need it.

What they want, Minister, is leadership. They want to know that when the programs are there—you're not transforming Judson's life. You're making a mess of Judson's life, and he and his family are struggling because of it. The fact is, Minister, you've been in charge for three years and the flaws in the system keep getting deeper.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): To the Chair, please.

Mr. Bill Walker: I want to know—through you, Mr. Speaker, to the minister—how much longer do Judson and other families just like his, in crisis, have to wait to get real leadership, real programs and real services?

Hon. Helena Jaczek: The reality is that we spend \$2 billion every year supporting individuals with developmental disabilities. Three years ago, we initiated an absolutely unprecedented investment in this sector: \$810 million over three years. As we all recall, that party opposite voted against that particular initiative.

Looking at their platforms back in 2014, neither of the opposition parties had anything to say about these most vulnerable Ontarians. Our government is standing up for them, and we are doing everything we possibly can to help situations exactly as the member has described.

MINING INDUSTRY

Mr. Michael Mantha: My question is to the Premier. This week, I attended the annual PDAC conference, where I had the chance to talk to many stakeholders from the mining sector.

This is what I heard, Premier: Despite 70,000 current jobs depending on the industry, we're way down on the list when it comes to investment attractiveness and policy effectiveness—only sixth in Canada when we should be first. Investors have no confidence in this government's policies.

This Liberal government keeps saying that it planned to spend \$1 billion in the last budget to develop infrastructure in the Ring of Fire. But besides lawyers, bureaucrats and accountants on Bay Street, where is the progress on the Ring of Fire?

Hon. Kathleen O. Wynne: Minister of Northern Development and Mines.

Hon. Bill Mauro: The member, in one question, talked about two different topics. One moment he's talking about the Ring of Fire, and in the first instance he's talking about investment in Ontario in the mineral development sector. Let's deal with the first half of it first.

Fundamentally, Speaker, the member is wrong. The increase in the exploration sector in the province of Ontario is going north. It is getting larger than it has been in the past. So I'm not sure who the member was talking to at PDAC, but I think that for those of us who attended that conference, on this side of the House, we are hearing a very different story. The industry is optimistic. They feel very excited about the way things are going in the province of Ontario right now. Actually, the raw numbers, when you look at exploration dollars being invested in the province of Ontario—the projection this year and the increase last year—speak very positively about what's going on in the province when it comes to the mineral development sector. We're very proud of that.

On the second half of his question, I'm happy to talk about that in the supplementary.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Mantha: Once again, to the Premier: First Nations communities, miners, prospectors and other people from the industry are frustrated with the lack of leadership from this government. This Liberal government has had a copy-and-paste approach to infrastructure plans in the last three Liberal budgets, without actually developing even a trail—even a trail—to the Ring of Fire.

First Nations are asking, as well as industry and many across northern Ontario, what has this government done and where have you been? The people of Ontario deserve better. First Nations are asking for action. When will you start delivering results and ignite the Ring of Fire?

Hon. Bill Mauro: Speaker, I think that if you talk to the nine Matawa First Nation member communities, they will tell you very clearly what we've done and where we've been.

Again, this is no different than the question that was asked by the PCs a little while ago where they wanted to frame the mining sector in Ontario in the context of only one project. Of course, that is their goal, to make it look like things are not going well.

As I said to the member from the official opposition, there are currently three mines under construction in the province of Ontario. Exploration dollars are increasing from where they were in the past, and of course when they're not, this is relative to global demand and global price. If the price is down, obviously exploration is not going to occur if they can't make money at it.

There are three mines under construction right now. The mining sector is doing well. We support it. The NIER Program, the Northern Industrial Electricity Rate Program, is a big part of that. Currently 10 mines benefit from that. It's a competitive sector and—

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Thank you.

The member from Nickel Belt on a point of order.

M^{me} France Gélinas: J'aimerais dire aux membres du Parlement jeunesse francophone que la période des questions n'est pas un modèle à imiter quand vous retournez à l'école. Souvenez-vous-en.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member does know better that that's not a point of order and should not have been made.

NOTICE OF DISSATISFACTION

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Pursuant to standing order 38(a), the member for Whitby-Oshawa has given notice of dissatisfaction with his question given by the minister responsible for advanced education and skills development concerning skills mismatch. This matter will be debated on Tuesday, March 21, 2017.

LEGISLATIVE PAGES

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before we move to deferred votes, I want to tell the members that this is the last day for our pages. We want to thank them very much

for the wonderful service that they have given to us. Good luck.

Applause.

DEFERRED VOTES

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE IN DYING STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE L'AIDE MÉDICALE À MOURIR

Deferred vote on the motion that the question be now put on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 84, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to medical assistance in dying / Projet de loi 84, Loi modifiant diverses lois en ce qui concerne l'aide médicale à mourir.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have a deferred vote on the motion for closure on the motion for second reading of Bill 84.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1142 to 1147.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): On February 21, 2017, Mr. Murray moved second reading of Bill 84, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to medical assistance in dying.

Mr. Bradley has moved that the question be now put.

All those in favour of Mr. Bradley's motion, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Ayes

Anderson, Granville	Flynn, Kevin Daniel	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Baker, Yvan	Fraser, John	Moridi, Reza
Ballard, Chris	Hoggarth, Ann	Murray, Glen R.
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hoskins, Eric	Naidoo-Harris, Indira
Bradley, James J.	Hunter, Mitzie	Naqvi, Yasir
Chan, Michael	Jaczek, Helena	Potts, Arthur
Chiarelli, Bob	Kiwala, Sophie	Qaadri, Shafiq
Colle, Mike	Kwinter, Monte	Rinaldi, Lou
Coteau, Michael	Leal, Jeff	Sandals, Liz
Crack, Grant	MacCharles, Tracy	Sousa, Charles
Damerla, Dipika	Malhi, Harinder	Takhar, Harinder S.
Del Duca, Steven	Mangat, Amrit	Thibeault, Glenn
Delaney, Bob	Martins, Cristina	Vernile, Daiene
Des Rosiers, Nathalie	Matthews, Deborah	Wong, Soo
Dhillon, Vic	Mauro, Bill	Wynne, Kathleen O.
Dong, Han	McGarry, Kathryn	Zimmer, David
Duguid, Brad	McMahon, Eleanor	

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

Nays

Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gélinas, France	Nicholls, Rick
Bailey, Robert	Gretzky, Lisa	Pettapiece, Randy
Bisson, Gilles	Hardeman, Ernie	Scott, Laurie
Campbell, Sarah	Hatfield, Percy	Singh, Jagmeet
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Jones, Sylvia	Smith, Todd
Clark, Steve	MacLeod, Lisa	Tabuns, Peter
Coe, Lorne	Mantha, Michael	Taylor, Monique
Fedeli, Victor	Martow, Gila	Thompson, Lisa M.

Forster, Cindy
French, Jennifer K.
Gates, Wayne

McDonell, Jim
Miller, Norm
Miller, Paul

Vanthof, John
Walker, Bill
Wilson, Jim

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 50; the nays are 33.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Mr. Murray has moved second reading of Bill 84, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to medical assistance in dying. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say “aye.”

Opposed, please say “nay.”

Carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister?

Hon. Eric Hoskins: I’d ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It shall be done.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 SUR LE SOUTIEN À L’ENFANCE, À LA JEUNESSE ET À LA FAMILLE

Deferred vote on the motion that the question now be put on the motion for second reading of the following bill:

Bill 89, An Act to enact the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, to amend and repeal the Child and Family Services Act and to make related amendments to other Acts / Projet de loi 89, Loi édictant la Loi de 2017 sur les services à l’enfance, à la jeunesse et à la famille, modifiant et abrogeant la Loi sur les services à l’enfance et à la famille et apportant des modifications connexes à d’autres lois.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): We have another deferred vote, on the motion for closure on the second reading of Bill 89.

Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1151 to 1152.

Interjections: Same vote.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Because we’re in the middle of this, I will make that call.

We have the same vote on closure. Carried.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 50; the nays are 33.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Mr. Coteau has moved second reading of Bill 89, An Act to enact the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, to amend and repeal the Child and Family Services Act and to make related amendments to other Acts. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I heard a no.

All those in favour, please say “aye.”

Opposed, say “nay.”

In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Call in the members—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I heard a no. Call in the members. This will be a five-minute bell.

The division bells rang from 1152 to 1153.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): You all do not know how hard it is not to say something.

Mr. Coteau has moved second reading of Bill 89, An Act to enact the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017, to amend and repeal the Child and Family Services Act and to make related amendments to other Acts.

All those in favour, please rise one at a time and be recorded by the Clerk.

Ayes

Anderson, Granville	French, Jennifer K.
Armstrong, Teresa J.	Gates, Wayne
Bailey, Robert	Gélinas, France
Baker, Yvan	Gretzky, Lisa
Ballard, Chris	Hardeman, Ernie
Berardinetti, Lorenzo	Hatfield, Percy
Bisson, Gilles	Hoggarth, Ann
Bradley, James J.	Hoskins, Eric
Campbell, Sarah	Hunter, Mitzie
Chan, Michael	Jaczek, Helena
Chiarelli, Bob	Jones, Sylvia
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon	Kiwala, Sophie
Clark, Steve	Kwinter, Monte
Coe, Lorne	Leal, Jeff
Colle, Mike	MacCharles, Tracy
Coteau, Michael	MacLeod, Lisa
Crack, Grant	Malhi, Harinder
Damerla, Dipika	Mangat, Amrit
Del Duca, Steven	Mantha, Michael
Delaney, Bob	Martins, Cristina
Des Rosiers, Nathalie	Martow, Gila
Dhillon, Vic	Matthews, Deborah
Dong, Han	Mauro, Bill
Duguid, Brad	McDonell, Jim
Fedeli, Victor	McGarry, Kathryn
Flynn, Kevin Daniel	McMahon, Eleanor
Forster, Cindy	Milczyn, Peter Z.
Fraser, John	Miller, Norm

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): All those opposed, please rise one at a time and be recognized by the Clerk.

The Clerk of the Assembly (Mr. Todd Decker): The ayes are 83; the nays are 0.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I declare the motion carried.

Second reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Minister?

Hon. Michael Coteau: I’d ask that the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Justice Policy.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Before we dismiss, I just wanted to offer all of you some time for your family during this particular break, but I know—and I want to go on record as saying—that most of you work very hard during these breaks, contrary to what some people would recommend. I want to say thank you very much for the work that you do in your ridings.

There are no further deferred votes. This House stands recessed until 1 p.m. this afternoon.

The House recessed from 1157 to 1300.

MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

DAUGHTERS OF THE VOTE

Ms. Lisa M. Thompson: Speaker, what a week this has been in Ottawa. As the Ontario representative on the Canadian region steering committee for the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, I had the absolute honour of being in Ottawa for the Daughters of the Vote. Speaker, you would be so proud of these ladies. There were 338 women, from every riding in this nation, standing tall in the House of Commons. They were passionate. They were eloquent. They were thoughtful. They were progressive. They were 4-H members, and they were ready to be heard. They proved that they deserved to be in that House.

There were so many highlights. There were girls who spoke about poverty, mental health, climate change, affordability, accessibility for the folks who have disabilities. This one lady really stuck with me, in the sense that she said, "I have to fight every day just to get around. I don't have to fight for equity in education."

There was Samantha from Sault Ste. Marie, who asked for equity in education for her indigenous community.

There was Ginger Uber, who spoke about the importance of supporting rural Ontario jobs, industry and agri-food businesses—couldn't have been prouder of that.

Then there was Trina. She asked for all of us, "Where are the non-indigenous allies? We need help with youth suicide."

Speaker, these ladies were awesome, and I just want to say to every member in this House, if you have yet to have a young lady volunteer to come here to Queen's Park on April 12, please get out there. Let them know there's an opportunity for them to have their voice heard right here in Ontario.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Sarah Campbell: My offices have been inundated with correspondence from constituents from across Kenora–Rainy River who have painstakingly tracked their ever-rising hydro bills.

A retired couple from Dryden wrote to me and said, "Our house is only 802 square feet. We heat with natural gas and the hot water tank is natural gas too. We have no air conditioning, the garage is not heated, and I don't plug in any vehicles in the winter. There is just my wife and I living here." Despite conserving as much as they can, their bills have nearly doubled.

A family in Sioux Lookout, who pride themselves on being energy-conscious, and who only use their washer and dryer at night or on the weekend, have a setback thermostat and use LED lights, showed me bills that have risen by more than 119%.

Northerners agree: "Electricity is not a frill—it's an essential part of our daily lives." But they don't need another 30-year mortgage with a four-year guaranteed rate. Northerners are looking for this government to

actually fix the mess it made and to make changes that will permanently lower hydro rates—like returning Hydro One to public hands, equalizing rural and urban delivery rates, capping private profit margins, and ending the time-of-use billing, to start.

The Premier says she understands that people are looking for lasting relief built on real change, so won't she show us a plan that does exactly that?

CRAFT DISTILLERIES AND BREWERIES

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm delighted to rise today to talk about an event I was at on Tuesday, when we announced, at the Summerhill LCBO on Yonge, the Small Cidery and Small Distillery Support Program. It is a culmination of about two years of my advocacy on this side of the House for these changes.

My involvement began as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and a visit to the Toronto Distillery in the Junction, where I met Charles Benoit, a true pioneer of craft distillery production. There I learned of the very grave difficulties the craft spirits industry was facing trying to compete with large distillers, and I made a vow to him that I would work hard to try to assist him.

I also met up with a group from the cider industry, Nick and Lindsay Sutcliffe—they're Pommies Cider—and they made it very clear how it was important for them to be on a level playing field with craft beer.

That reminded me that about 38 years ago—almost 40 years ago—I participated in the Campaign for Real Ale Canada and helped create the laws in Ontario that allowed craft beer to flourish. I knew we had to do the same for craft ciders and craft distillers—create a level playing field.

This new program will provide \$4.9 million over three years and allow individual cideries and distilleries to get up to \$200,000 in support rebates, based on what they sell.

I'd like to give a shout-out to Mike Heisz, owner of Junction 56 Distillery, and Don DiMonte, the treasurer of the association and founder of Last Straw Distillery in Vaughan.

On the craft cider side, I want to thank Thomas Wilson, the new president. They're doing a great job. It's good for business and good for Ontario.

REALTORS

Mr. Todd Smith: I want to share with members of the House an issue that realtors in my riding won't stop talking to me about. Whether I'm watching a hockey game at the Essroc Arena in Wellington or sitting at a chamber of commerce breakfast in Belleville, a realtor will, without fail, come up to me and ask me when I'm reintroducing my bill allowing realtors to incorporate in Ontario.

Personal incorporations are an important tool that allows small business owners to retain more pre-tax

income. Realtors are pillars of their community, Speaker. When I'm at a special event in Picton or a hospice gala in Bancroft, realtors are not just in attendance; their brokerages have usually sponsored the events, or they're using their Rolodex to make sure people are buying tickets.

Other professionals in Ontario are allowed to incorporate, including chartered accountants, lawyers, health professionals, social workers and mortgage brokers. By giving realtors the same ability, some of the money will go into their business but a lot of it will end up going back into the community. Not only are the majority of professions allowed to incorporate, but other provinces, including BC, Quebec, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, all allow realtors to incorporate. Unfortunately, Ontario continues to lag behind, and that's why I introduced the Tax Fairness for Realtors Act yesterday.

I've had the opportunity to introduce the legislation in the past. I want to thank the members from Eglinton-Lawrence and Kitchener-Waterloo for co-sponsoring this time. The Tax Fairness for Realtors Act will amend the Real Estate and Business Brokers Act to enable realtors to form personal corporations. I ask for the Legislature to support me on March 23.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further members' statements? The member from Etobicoke south—North.

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM FUNDING

Mr. Shafiq Qaadri: We've got it all, Speaker: north and south, but technically north.

First of all, I'd like to thank our staff, Sinéad and Mora, for allowing me to share once again the cascade of new developments that are coming to the community of Etobicoke North. I'll talk about two sectors, Speaker: one is health care and one is transportation.

In terms of health care, we're very proud to announce the \$358-million development for Etobicoke General Hospital. As you can imagine, there's a long list of things that are going to accrue to the community: a state-of-the-art emergency department, intensive care unit, critical care unit, new maternal newborn unit, ambulatory procedures unit, cardiodiagnostics, neurodiagnostics—actually it's going to be a 250,000-square-foot addition of new space. We are, I think, quadrupling the footprint of Etobicoke General Hospital, so that's fantastic news for the community.

As well, a \$2-billion transportation expansion, Finch West Light-Rail Transit, or LRT. It's going to have eight stops in the riding of Etobicoke North. They are: Islington, Kipling, Stevenson, Albion Road, Martin Grove, Westmore, Highway 27—all the way, going up to Humber College, which by the way, also is the beneficiary of a \$90-million grant from various levels of government, including our own.

Speaker, all I can say, in conclusion: Whether it's transportation, health care or education, Etobicoke North, like its member, is on the move.

CRAFT DISTILLERIES

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: Today is a happy day for Ontario's craft distilleries. This afternoon we will be debating the Free My Rye Act, introduced by the member for Leeds-Grenville. Bill 50 expands market access for craft distilleries through the LCBO network. It provides tax relief through a graduated tax rate—welcome relief, I might add, after the Liberal government's tax grab with the new job-killing distillery tax.

It allows craft distillers to sell their product directly to bars, restaurants and consumers, cutting out the middleman, and it allows for the on-site sale of spirits by the glass. Visitors to our wonderful craft distilleries, including Junction 56 in Stratford, will surely appreciate this. Last year, I toured Junction 56. Mike Heisz and his team are making an enormous contribution to their industry and our community. We need them to succeed.

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For a long time, we've called on the government to level the playing field for Junction 56 and many others. The government recently announced some good ideas from the Free My Rye Act, but their move is a half-measure. It's bathtub gin.

Bill 50 goes further. It better supports craft distillers and gives consumers more choice. That's why the Ontario Craft Distillers Association endorsed it. I think members of all parties should follow their lead. That's something we can all raise a glass to.

SALUBRITÉ ALIMENTAIRE

M. Gilles Bisson: J'ai la chance de faire un suivi, dans la semaine qui s'en vient, avec la fromagerie Kapuskoise, à Kapuskasing. Comme on le sait déjà, on s'est rencontrés, avec le ministre, pour changer le règlement afin que les fromages artisans—afin d'être capable de les transporter par la poste et à travers la province et autres, autrement qu'avec les règles pour le lait. Si tu prends un fromage artisan et que tu le mets dans le réfrigérateur et que tu fais tomber la température à cinq degrés, ça ôte la saveur au fromage. Donc, on essaye d'avoir des changements aux règlements pour que ces fromages artisans, on puisse les transporter comme ils le faisaient en France et comme ils le font tout partout en Europe. Parce que certains fromages artisans ne sont pas faits pour être réfrigérés, ils peuvent se faire transporter à une température un peu plus élevée.

Donc, on va faire un suivi avec ce dossier-là la semaine prochaine avec le Porcupine Health Unit—je le dis en anglais parce que ce n'est pas une organisation bilingue. On va faire un suivi avec eux autres, une deuxième rencontre, pour voir ce qu'on peut faire au niveau local en attendant les changements aux règlements que le ministre de l'Agriculture nous dit qu'il est préparé à faire.

Si vous avez une chance, que vous passez à travers Kapuskasing, arrêtez à la fromagerie Kapuskoise : les meilleurs fromages artisans que vous allez manger n'importe où, incluant la France.

OPIOID ABUSE

Mr. John Fraser: We've seen in British Columbia the effects of opioid use and addiction, and how they continue to negatively affect the community. We see those impacts in our communities now. We read stories about the serious consequences that drugs—opioids, things like fentanyl—have in our communities. This is a really serious challenge in our communities.

Opioids, especially fentanyl, are destructive and lethal drugs. Fentanyl is 80 times more powerful than morphine. I was at a community meeting last week, and the father of a son who had been addicted to opioids for the last five years said this: "The first pill can kill you. The second pill can kill you. The third pill will destroy you."

This is a community challenge, and it requires a community response to address this emerging challenge. In particular, parents of teenagers and youth need to understand the resources that are available to them. We need to utilize our capacity and address any gaps that we have in the needs of our community.

I'm very pleased that the Premier made a \$2.5-million commitment to support a local plan to deal with opioid addiction and overdoses. I know we're working very hard on getting naloxone into the hands of first responders.

In that spirit, there are many community meetings being held in my community. There's one in Ottawa at Glebe Collegiate, and there are a few more. I will be hosting one on March 27, a Monday evening. It's a community information meeting for parents, grandparents, youth and anyone who's interested to come and find out answers to their questions and what we have in our communities.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: As always, it is a great honour to stand in the Legislature and speak on behalf of the fine people of Niagara West–Glanbrook.

I stand today to plead with the government to impose a moratorium on school closures across Ontario. In my riding, Beamsville District Secondary School, Grimsby Secondary School and South Lincoln High School are being pressured to close by this government, a government that fails to recognize the importance of our rural schools.

Schools under capacity are ongoing occurrences in rural and small-town Ontario, but instead of helping to keep students in their own communities, government and school boards seem to have lost touch with communities.

The "bigger is better" approach, shifting funding from small schools to larger and combined schools, has proven wrong time and time again. Neither the ministry nor the boards provide evidence that larger combined schools enhance student achievement. There is research showing that small schools provide excellent learning environments.

I'm incredibly disappointed that this Liberal government voted against our leader Patrick Brown's motion to

put a moratorium on the school closures. I call on this government to listen to parents, stick up for students, and stop the closure of our rural schools.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): I thank all members for their statements.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

REA AND WALTER ACT (TRUSS AND LIGHTWEIGHT CONSTRUCTION IDENTIFICATION), 2017

LOI REA ET WALTER DE 2017 SUR L'IDENTIFICATION DES COMPOSANTS STRUCTURAUX À OSSATURE LÉGÈRE

Mr. Pettapiece moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 105, An Act governing the identification of truss and lightweight construction in buildings / Projet de loi 105, Loi régissant l'identification des composants structuraux à ossature légère incorporés aux bâtiments.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The member for a short statement.

Mr. Randy Pettapiece: This bill amends the Building Code Act, 1992, regarding the identification of truss and lightweight construction in specified buildings that are under construction or to be constructed.

MOTIONS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I believe we have unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice regarding private members' public business.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The Minister of the Environment and Climate Change is seeking unanimous consent to put forward a motion without notice. Do we agree? Agreed.

Hon. Glen R. Murray: I move that, notwithstanding standing order 98(g), notice for ballot item 41 be waived.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): The minister moves the waiving of notice on ballot item number 41. Do we agree? Agreed. Carried.

Motion agreed to.

STATEMENTS BY THE MINISTRY AND RESPONSES

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S WEEK

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise today in recognition of International

Women's Week, now being celebrated in communities across the province.

As you may know, a highlight of the week is International Women's Day, which occurred yesterday: a day in which the world stands together in support of a woman's right to equality and empowerment. I am grateful and proud that in this province, our government is deeply committed to the strength, success and empowerment of women and girls, and that each year we can look forward to marking and recognizing the progress women have made through our leadership and partnerships. This week is also a time to take stock of the work that is still to be done for women, not just here but around the country and the world, to achieve full social, political and economic equality.

I began this week by attending the start of a very important three-day event for women in our country. This week, Ontario is hosting the fifth National Indigenous Women's Summit in Canada. It was an amazing event. Indigenous representatives and government are coming together for important conversations and work on a wide range of key issues facing indigenous women. I have been there each day to listen, to contribute and to learn as Ontario's Minister of the Status of Women. It's an important conversation, one that affects all of us, and one that I am honoured to be participating in.

On Tuesday evening, I was in Ottawa at an incredible event with Daughters of the Vote. It was a room filled with hundreds of strong and motivated young women from each of the federal ridings in our country—a room filled with our future leaders. It was impressive, it was inspiring and it was absolutely energizing.

This event and the many other events this week serve to underline and emphasize the importance of this year's theme for International Women's Day in Canada: "Equality Matters." And, yes, it does. That's why we are focusing on it this year. In fact, earlier this week, I, along with many partners working on the equality and empowerment of women, officially celebrated Ontario's first-ever stand-alone Ministry of the Status of Women.

Applause.

Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris: Many of my colleagues were there. It was a very special moment for all of us, and one I was very proud to be participating in.

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The ministry was created earlier this year by our Premier. Premier Wynne had the vision to recognize the importance of creating a ministry focused on fairness for women. It builds on more than 30 years of outstanding work by the Ontario Women's Directorate and by our many partners.

This ministry is our foundation, our rock as we move forward, guiding our government's commitment to gender equality, ending violence against women and girls, and the economic empowerment of women, which is so important. I am deeply honoured to be serving as the first Minister of the Status of Women in this province, and to be able to highlight for members today some of the work that we're doing.

This week, we also released the annual update of It's Never Okay: An Action Plan to Stop Sexual Violence and Harassment in Ontario. Our government launched this groundbreaking plan two years ago on International Women's Day in response to the prevalence of sexual violence and harassment in our society—a very troubling issue. The goal was to help change attitudes, improve supports, and make campuses and workplaces safe from sexual violence and harassment.

Our plan is working. We are producing measurable change, and we continue to work with our partners to drive progress forward in this crucial area.

We've also made important progress through Walking Together. This is our government's strategy to end violence against indigenous women. It was developed and released one year ago in collaboration with the indigenous partners on the joint working group to end violence against indigenous women.

In addition, as part of those commitments, our government launched a strategy to end human trafficking this past June. Two weeks ago, on February 22, we introduced legislation which, if passed, will hold traffickers accountable, support survivors and absolutely raise awareness about this terrible crime.

The strength and power of women is in the air right now. The time is now for action on solving the challenges women face. That action was on full, inspiring display during January's Women's March, which saw people worldwide marching peacefully together on behalf of women's rights.

We are seeing this every day in our province with the determination to protect and improve the gains that women and girls have made. We all know what it means to lead by example: It means accountability, and for our government, that's critical.

When it comes to setting targets for women on boards last June, our government set a target of 40% for all provincial board and agency appointments by 2019. We're doing this because we are challenging not only ourselves but businesses to put more women on boards too. We are encouraging businesses to set a target by the end of this year of appointing 30% women to their boards of directors.

Some of you may recall a recent photograph in the papers of a young girl facing off against a bull on Wall Street. That's what this is about: It's about ensuring that we're putting women in places of leadership and on boards. Why? Because gender diversity in corporate leadership benefits women and society, and Ontario's economy can only gain from women's full participation and equality. And because it's the right thing to do.

Women's equality is about fairness and access, whether it be to boards, to education, to reproductive rights or to economic independence. It means owning the rights to our own bodies. It means having the ability to make choices that allow all women and girls everywhere to fulfill their unique potential.

Speaker, we are all stronger—stronger when women and girls are treated fairly and equally, when they are

empowered and when they are able to reach their full potential. After all, once that happens, there is no limit—no limit to what women can achieve.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): It is time for responses.

Ms. Laurie Scott: I'm pleased to be able to speak today as PC critic for women's issues in honour of International Women's Day, which we celebrated yesterday. Each year, International Women's Day offers an important opportunity to reflect on the past, present and future of women in Ontario, Canada and around the world. This year marks the 109th International Women's Day, and the global theme is recognizing women in the changing world of work. As you can imagine, 109 years ago the world of work for women looked very different than it does today. In fact, it took tireless and persistent efforts from women to expand the areas in which women were even allowed to work.

A key turning point came at the outbreak of the First World War, when there was a sudden shortage of workers. It was women who stepped forward to fill the gap. Canadian women became a key part of the war effort, working at home and overseas as nurses in the military, and in the manufacturing sector at home.

The essential services performed by women during the war were part of a changing tide. Canadian suffragists had been lobbying Prime Minister Robert Borden to grant women the right to vote since 1912. In 1917, Prime Minister Borden passed the Wartime Elections Act, granting the vote to women serving in the military, as well as to women related to serving soldiers. In May 1918, all Canadian women received the right to vote federally. At last, the contributions of women were matched by their civic responsibility. Not only could women work, but they could contribute their voice to the governance of this country.

As we mark the 100 years since Ontario women first gained the right to vote, we also reflect on other important milestones, such as the election of the first woman to the Legislature 73 years ago and then the appointment of the first woman to cabinet 43 years ago. We celebrated Daughters of the Vote from each riding in Ontario on February 21 here at Queen's Park, and earlier this week, 338 young women went to Ottawa and took their places in the House of Commons.

Today, in Ontario, women are essential to our workforce. Women are leaders in science, the arts, politics, business, medicine, academia—in every field of endeavour, and yet we still have to contend with a gender wage gap in this province and in this country. In Ontario, women make only 87% of a man's hourly wage, on average. While this number represents significant progress over the last several decades, there is no reason there should not be parity today. Women's equality is essential.

As we look forward to the future, I want to encourage every woman to speak up confidently. The voices and the work of women are essential to the economic, cultural and social success of our province, and they're essential to the good governance of our province.

Finally, it would be impossible to look forward without helping the province's most vulnerable women. I've heard the minister mention the action plans, and I want to mention that I appreciate that. There's still more work that needs to be done to further protect women from sexual violence and harassment. For two years, I've been advocating for legislation in Ontario to protect and support trafficked women. Recently, the government did introduce an anti-human trafficking bill based largely on my private member's bill, Saving the Girl Next Door Act. These protections are essential for women and girls who are victimized right now. I urge the government make Bill 96 a priority to protect our most disadvantaged women and girls as soon as possible.

So, in closing, as we recognize the historic accomplishments of the women that have come before us, we draw inspiration from the women around us today and look ahead to the work that still needs to be done. But I know that with all of us here, working together to empower and support women, it is possible to look ahead to a future in which women enjoy full equality of opportunity across Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, let us celebrate women.

The Speaker (Hon. Dave Levac): Further responses?

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I am proud to rise today on behalf of Ontario NDP leader Andrea Horwath, leader of the only parliamentary caucus in Canada with a majority of women, to reflect on International Women's Day.

So much of what we have accomplished in Ontario has been a result of the pioneering sisters who toiled before us, and for that we are profoundly grateful. But much remains to be done to address the issues of economic insecurity and violence that are the reality for far too many Ontario women.

This year's theme for International Women's Day is "Women in the Changing World of Work," a theme that is particularly relevant right now in our province. Rapid workplace changes are creating opportunities for some, but are leaving far too many women behind. Women are more likely than men to work in jobs that are part-time, that are low-paid and that provide no benefits. This is especially the case for women who are black, indigenous, or women of colour. But after four years in office and three majority governments, the Liberals have done little to improve women's experience in the changing world of work.

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Women make up the majority of Ontario's minimum-wage workers. Economic security means not only having enough for these women to cover their monthly expenses, but also being able to build a future. It means not having to worry that a major life event such as losing a job or getting sick will result in poverty. A \$15 minimum wage is a first and critical step to achieve women's economic security, but it is a step the Liberals are refusing to take.

Even though more women are working today than ever before, their share of income still lags far behind that of men, with a gender wage gap that is stagnant at 30% regardless of where women work or what work they do. This gap increases to 39% for immigrant women and to 57% for indigenous women. But the Liberals continue

to drag their heels on the strategies needed to close the gender wage gap, strategies that advocates have been calling for for years.

Not only do women earn less than men; they also shoulder the enormous burden of unpaid care and domestic work. Women are 20 times more likely than men to report that lack of access to child care is a barrier to workforce entry. The Liberal government's refusal to create a true system of child care widens the gender wage gap and leaves women with children earning 12% to 20% less than women without children—that is, if a family is lucky enough to find child care. In Toronto alone, there are approximately 17,000 children on a waiting list for subsidized care. In the face of these pressures, instead of supporting an NDP private member's bill to invest in high-quality, affordable non-profit child care, the Liberals are prepared to invest instead in the growth of traded, private sector child care businesses, which research shows are lower quality.

Finally, there is the issue of violence against women. This last year, we've heard judges telling women to keep their knees together to avoid being raped. We've heard about police routinely dismissing one in five cases of sexual assault as not even worth investigating. And we've seen a continuing epidemic of domestic violence that shows no sign of letting up.

If we are serious about stemming the tide of violence against women, paid leave for domestic violence and sexual violence has to be more than just a footnote in the Changing Workplaces Review. Employment is a key pathway for women to leave an abusive relationship, and women who experience violence should not have to risk the loss of their job because of the violence they have experienced. If there is one thing we can collectively do immediately to change the world of work for women for the better, it is providing this paid leave. Women should not have to choose between their job and their safety. The Liberal government has an opportunity to show leadership on this issue by moving my private member's bill, Bill 26, through committee now so that it can be passed into law in the province of Ontario.

Speaker, gender inequality serves no one and costs everyone. By working together to achieve equality for women in Ontario, we will strengthen this province for all of us.

PETITIONS

HYDRO RATES

Mr. Steve Clark: I'd like to thank Mary Kay Munnings of Cardinal for these petitions, signed by more than 1,500 people demanding hydro relief.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas the cost of hydro in Ontario has become a burden to the people of this province;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to take immediate action to:

"Deem hydro a necessity for all Ontarians;

"Eliminate the delivery fee or implement a shared delivery fee;

"Keep Hydro public;

"Cancel or renegotiate all contracts and sell our electricity for more than Ontarians pay;

"Revisit all Hydro employee salaries and implement salary caps;

"Eliminate the global adjustment fee;

"Refund two of the three extra years for residential and three of the extra five years for businesses that the Liberals collected the debt retirement fee;

"Develop a cost-effective, long-term, sustainable plan for hydro in Ontario;

"Implement an immediate moratorium on disconnections including load limiters until long-term plan is complete.

"Respond to this petition with specific answers for each request. Form letter will not suffice."

I'm pleased to affix my signature, and I'll send the petition to the table with page Hailey.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Mr. Percy Hatfield: I will shorten this lengthy petition down. It's to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. It's labelled, "Protect Ojibway Prairie."

"Whereas the Ojibway Prairie Complex is a five-park system totalling 332 hectares. It represents half of the city of Windsor's remaining natural areas;

"Whereas Ojibway has 160 species at risk.... It represents Canada's ... most endangered ecosystem...;

"Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To designate this land with provincial importance and prevent any development on or adjacent to this land, so that the land will be protected and so too will the 91 species at risk, including six endangered and 12 threatened species on schedule 1 of the Endangered Species Act."

Speaker, I fully endorse this petition. I will sign it and send it to the desk with Annissa.

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

Mr. Arthur Potts: I too have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, signed by dozens and dozens from my own community of Beaches-East York.

"Whereas the Ontario government needs to strengthen primary care as the foundation of the health care system to achieve health system transformation goals of Patients First; and

"Whereas research shows that interprofessional primary health care delivers better outcomes for people and better value for money; and

"Whereas an investment in primary care will help address recruitment and retention challenges, build strong interprofessional primary care teams and ensure high-quality people-centred primary health care delivery in Ontario; and

"Whereas over 7,500 staff in over 400 community health centres, family health teams, aboriginal health access centres and nurse practitioner-led clinics are being paid below rates recommended in 2012 and as a result are facing challenges recruiting and retaining health providers, including nurse practitioners, dietitians, registered nurses, health promoters and managers;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to invest in interprofessional primary health care teams with a commitment of \$130 million annualized, with an implementation plan over two years, to ensure interprofessional primary health care teams can effectively retain and recruit staff."

I agree completely with this petition. I just realized I don't have a pen to sign it, but I've got one coming. Thank you, Speaker, very much, and I'll leave it with page Benjamin.

DIABETES GLUCOSE MONITORING

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: "To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas technological and research advancements alter the findings of the 2011 Medical Advisory Secretariat document 'Continuous Glucose Monitoring for Patients with Diabetes: An Evidence-Based Analysis'; and

"Whereas the Endocrine Society's continuous glucose monitoring clinical practice guidelines recommend continuous glucose monitor use by people living with type 1 diabetes, and has deemed that the benefits justify the costs; and

"Whereas the Canadian Diabetes Association's Diabetes Charter for Canada states that Canadians living with diabetes have the right to affordable and timely access to prescribed devices and insurance coverage; and that governments have the responsibility to guarantee fair access to devices and supplies to all Canadians, no matter what their income or where they live; and

"Whereas government coverage of continuous glucose monitors is increasing internationally but is not available in Canada;

"Therefore, we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to provide financial coverage for continuous glucose monitors through the Ontario Assistive Devices Program or other appropriate provincial government program."

I am pleased to present this petition. I affix my signature to it and I will give it to page Kyra.

HYDRO RATES

Ms. Sarah Campbell: I have a petition here which reads as follows:

"Whereas home heating and electricity are essential utilities for northern families;

"Whereas the government has a duty and an obligation to ensure that essential goods and services are affordable

for all families living in the north and across the province;

"Whereas government policy such as the Green Energy Act, the harmonized sales tax, cancellation of gas plants in Oakville and Mississauga have caused the price of electricity to artificially increase to the point it is no longer affordable for families or small business;

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"Whereas electricity generated and used in northwestern Ontario is among the cleanest and cheapest to produce in Canada, yet has been inflated by government policy;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"To take immediate steps to reduce the price of electricity in the northwest and ensure that residents and businesses have access to energy that properly reflects the price of local generation."

I support this petition, will affix my signature and give it to page Rowan to deliver to the table.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. John Fraser: I'm presenting this petition on behalf of my colleague from Ottawa Centre, Yasir Naqvi.

"Support Cap-and-Trade to Fight Climate Change.

"To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

"Whereas climate change is not a distant threat and it is already costing the people of Ontario;

"Whereas Ontario is establishing itself as a leader on climate change action and science by building a strong, low-carbon economy, which will help avoid irreparable damage to our environment, and leave a legacy of a healthy planet for our children and our children's children;

"Whereas Ontario released the climate change action plan in 2007, which included targets of 6% below 1990 emission levels by 2014 and 15% below 1990 levels by 2020; and 80% below 1990 levels by 2050;

"Whereas cap-and-trade programs in other jurisdictions like Quebec and California have been proven to reduce emissions;

"Whereas a cap-and-trade program will set a limit on greenhouse gas pollution, reward innovative companies, provide certainty for industries and improve our quality of life;

"We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

"That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario supports a cap-and-trade system as an effective mechanism to fight climate change."

I agree with this petition, and I'm going to give it to page Anellaah.

SCHOOL CLOSURES

Mr. Steve Clark: I have a petition to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario.

“Whereas a staff report has recommended Upper Canada District School Board close numerous schools across eastern Ontario including Leeds—Grenville; and

“Whereas access to quality local education is essential for rural communities to thrive; and

“Whereas the Ministry of Education removed community impact considerations from pupil accommodation review guidelines in 2015; and

“Whereas local communities treasure their public schools and have been active participants in their continued operation, maintenance and success; and

“Whereas the Ontario government should focus on delivering quality, local education services to all communities, including rural Ontario;

“Therefore we, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“—to reinstate considerations of value to the local community and value to the local economy in pupil accommodation review guidelines; and

“—to work with all school boards, including Upper Canada District School Board, to modify the funding model to include appropriate funding that considers rural education opportunities, student busing times, accessible extracurricular and inter-school activities, a school’s role as a community hub, and its value to the local economy.”

I’m pleased to affix my signature to the petition, and I’ll send it to the table with page Ismael.

VACCIN CONTRE LE ZONA

M. Michael Mantha: J’ai une pétition intitulée « Pétition pour le vaccin zona pour toutes les personnes âgées ».

« À l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario :

« Considérant que le gouvernement de l’Ontario a annoncé qu’à compter du 15 septembre 2016, le vaccin contre le zona sera disponible gratuitement aux personnes âgées de 65 à 70 ans (la population née en 1945 pourra se faire vacciner jusqu’au 31 décembre 2016);

« Considérant que les personnes âgées de plus de 70 ans seront toujours tenues de payer pour le vaccin s’ils ou elles le veulent;

« Considérant que le gouvernement de l’Ontario dit que les études démontrent que le vaccin est très efficace pour les personnes âgées de 65 et 70 ans;

« Nous, signataires de cette pétition, demandons à l’Assemblée législative de l’Ontario de changer cette politique discriminatoire et demandons au gouvernement que toutes les personnes âgées de l’Ontario soient admissibles gratuitement au vaccin du zona. »

Je suis complètement d’accord avec cette pétition. Je la présente à la page Sophie pour l’apporter à la table du Greffier.

SPEED LIMITS

Mr. John Fraser: I am presenting this petition on behalf of my colleague from Ottawa Centre, Yasir Naqvi.

“Set the default speed limit to 40 km/h on residential streets.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas we must always strive to improve road safety for Ontario’s pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists;

“Whereas current research shows that reducing the speed limit to 40 km/h dramatically reduces the number of pedestrian fatalities and lessens the extent of injuries incurred during an accident;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“That the Legislative Assembly of Ontario amend the Highway Traffic Act to set the default speed limit to 40 km/h on residential streets and 30 km/h in school zones across the province.”

I agree with this petition. I’m affixing my signature and giving it to page Nolan.

OSTOMY SUPPLIES

Mr. Victor Fedeli: “To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there are thousands of ostomy patients across Ontario, many of whom are on fixed incomes; and

“Whereas ostomy supplies are mandatory to ensure the best sanitary practices for, and to maintain good health of, those that live with an ostomy; and

“Whereas the Assistive Devices Program (ADP) has funded a maximum of \$600 annually for ostomy supplies, which in some cases is merely a third of the annual cost, and has not increased that amount since coverage started in 1993;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario to increase the coverage of ostomy supplies through the ADP program as the current \$600 limit does not account for the increasing cost of these vital supplies.

I agree with this. I sign my name and give it to page Ismael.

CHILD CARE

Mr. Percy Hatfield: A petition circulated by the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care:

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas the Child Care and Early Years Act, 2014 commits Ontario to ‘a system of responsive, safe, high-quality and accessible child care and early years programs and services that will support parents and families, and will contribute to the healthy development of children’;

“Whereas recent community opposition to Ontario’s child care regulation proposals indicates that a new direction for child care is necessary to address issues of access, quality, funding, system building, planning and workforce development;

“Whereas Ontario’s Gender Wage Gap Strategy consultation found ‘child care was the number one issue everywhere’ and ‘participants called for public funding

and support that provides both adequate wages and affordable fees’;

“Whereas the federal government’s commitment to a National Early Learning and Child Care Framework provides an excellent opportunity for Ontario to take leadership and work collaboratively to move forward on developing a universal, high-quality, comprehensive child care system in Ontario;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

“To undertake a transparent policy process with the clear goal of developing a universal early childhood education and child care system where all families can access quality child care programs; and

“To publicly declare their commitment to take leadership in developing a national child care plan with the federal government that adopts the principles of universality, high quality and comprehensiveness.”

I fully agree. I’ll give this to Grace to bring up to the front desk.

INCLUSIVENESS

Mr. John Fraser: I’m presenting a petition on behalf of World-Changing Kids, a great organization in my riding—a kindness petition.

“To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

“Whereas there has been an increase in fear and hate towards people in our communities who practise different religions and who are from different cultures and races than the majority of the population; and

“Whereas many of our friends are feeling frightened and alone in the face of any form of discrimination and hate; and

“Whereas we want to show the world that the hate seen in Ontario does not reflect the people of our province; and

“Whereas we believe that everyone should feel welcome and safe in our communities. It is the diversity of our province that makes it so wonderful;

“We, the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly ... as follows:

“That all members of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario stand up and speak out against all forms of hate and discrimination and stand together in love and kindness.”

I agree with this petition and I’m going to give it to page Anellah.

ESTIMATES

Hon. Liz Sandals: I have a message from Her Honour Elizabeth Dowdeswell, the Lieutenant Governor, signed by her own hand.

1350

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required for the services of the province for the year ending 31 March 2017 and recommends them to the Legislative

Assembly. Toronto, 8 March 2017. Her Honour Elizabeth Dowdeswell.

We thank Her Honour.
Orders of the day.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BUSINESS

SAFE TEXTING ZONES ACT, 2017 LOI DE 2017 SUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT DE HALTES TEXTO SÉCURITAIRES

Mr. Fedeli moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 19, An Act governing the designation and use of texting zones / Projet de loi 19, Loi régissant la désignation et l'utilisation des haltes texto.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Good afternoon, Speaker. It’s a pleasure to rise to speak on my private member’s bill, which has the potential to save many lives. This is Bill 19, the Safe Texting Zones Act.

It’s nice to be here today, Speaker, to speak again on this important bill. As many know, this bill previously had passed second reading with all-party support prior to prorogation last year. Anybody who drives here in Ontario has encountered other drivers who are staring down at the dimly lit screen of their cellphones as opposed to paying attention to the road. We know that distracted driving, such as texting while driving, leads to bad driving, bad driving habits and dangerous situations.

Research and statistics are clear. Texting while driving poses a major risk for drivers and those they share the road with. In fact, distracted driving deaths in Ontario have surpassed those of impaired driving for the eighth consecutive year. This is serious, Speaker. This is a serious crisis that we have. According to the Ministry of Transportation, research shows that drivers who use cellphones are four times more likely to be in a collision than drivers who focus on the road. When drivers take their eyes off the road for more than two seconds, car crash risk doubles. And it’s not only yourself, Speaker, who is being endangered; it’s your family and it is the people who you may be involved with in an accident.

The Ontario Provincial Police cite distracted driving as a causal factor in between 30% and 50% of traffic collisions in Ontario. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, 80% of collisions and 65% of near-crashes have some form of driver inattention as a contributing factor.

Perhaps the message is starting to cut through, Speaker. You’ll recall—I brought this up last year—there was a billboard that went up on the Gardiner Expressway and, in bold black letters against a plain white background, the billboard simply had three words, “Text and

Drive.” Then underneath it said, “Courtesy of Wathan Funeral Home.” It was, of course, tongue-in-cheek. They’re not really a funeral home, Speaker. It was part of a campaign to help stop Canadians from texting and driving. In fact, it was a billboard campaign all throughout North America. CNN ran a story on it, saying, “Oh, how awful, in poor taste, this funeral home.” Once you go on the website, you realize they come out right away and say, “Isn’t it horrible? We’re not a real funeral home. This is a message for you.” It’s that important that it was universally presented throughout North America.

Shocking as that billboard was, you need to face the facts. Drivers who text-message—remember I told you a minute ago that drivers who use cellphones are four times more likely to be in a crash? Well, drivers who text message are 23 times more likely to be involved in a crash.

This has significant economic impacts. According to the government of Canada, economic losses caused by traffic, collision-related health care costs, and lost productivity across the country on an annual basis are \$10 billion. That’s about 1% of Canada’s GDP.

Here we have Bill 19, on safe texting zones. What is a safe texting zone? Speaker, a texting zone is simply an area—in fact, for the most part, an existing area—where a driver is able to park or stop safely, to use their wireless device.

Hon. Jeff Leal: The Americans have that on their interstates.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I’m going to tell all about that. Thank you, Minister.

Bill 19 proposes to amend the Highway Traffic Act and the Public Transportation and Highway Improvement Act with the aim of combatting distracted driving. Specifically, it authorizes the Minister of Transportation to create designated highway texting zones where a driver is able to stop safely to use their device. This includes existing commuter lots, transit stations or service stations, and does not require any new infrastructure.

The real impetus of this bill would require—you’ll like this, Minister—that signage be displayed approaching these texting zones. That signage would remind drivers that there is a nearby opportunity for them to legally and safely use their cellphone.

Interjection.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Do you like that?

Mr. Arthur Potts: I love that.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Of course, you can still use hand-held devices if a vehicle is pulled off the roadway or lawfully parked. This bill would designate specific areas to do exactly that: to assist drivers in obeying the law.

Designating specific texting zones would be especially helpful in reducing distracted driving on highways and in rural and northern areas, where frequent picnic stops and rest stops along the highway offer an opportunity for travellers to safely use their cellphones.

I’m pleased that Bill 19 has received support from many stakeholders, including from the insurance industry and safety advocates. I would like to take a moment and

read a quote from Kim Donaldson, the Insurance Bureau of Canada’s vice-president for Ontario:

“Since 2009, IBC has been at the forefront of the distracted driving issue: promoting awareness of the dangers of distracted driving through research, ad campaigns and community outreach. Statistics show that drivers are 23 times more likely to be involved in a collision if they text while driving. Mr. Fedeli’s bill would provide for more dedicated safe spaces for drivers to stop and use their devices. These locations could cut down on the frequency of auto collisions and could ultimately save lives. On behalf of our members, IBC is pleased to support this initiative and we look forward to working with all MPPs to make our roads safer for all Ontarians.”

Speaker, as the minister mentioned earlier, there’s precedent for this; we see it all the time. In 2013, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo established texting zones across thruways and state highways in New York. Existing Park-n-Ride facilities, rest stops and parking areas along the roads were equipped with texting zone signage, each serving double duty as one of the 91 locations across the state.

When introducing this initiative, Governor Cuomo said, “With this new effort, we are sending a clear message to drivers that there is no excuse to take your hands off the wheel and eyes off the road because your text can wait until the next texting zone.”

Not only will this save lives; it will be an important educational initiative. In some cases, when youth have grown up with these devices, they may not be aware of the link between distracted driving and collisions. This legislation will provide more awareness and make it crystal clear to new drivers that texting while driving is unacceptable.

Bill 19 will ensure that there is a consistent and standardized signage approach. Desjardins Insurance Group echoed this by stating: “This bill brings much-needed attention to distracted driving, an increasingly prevalent road safety issue....”

Recently, Desjardins polled 1,300 Canadian drivers and asked them about their driving habits. Some 30% of Canadians said the most dangerous thing a person can do on the road is distracted driving, and still 33% of Canadians admitted to checking their hand-held device at least once while driving. The introduction of safe texting zones can be part of the solution of this growing problem.

1400

As you know, Speaker, it is currently illegal for drivers to talk, type, text, dial or email using hand-held cellphones and other devices. It’s also illegal for drivers to look at display screens such as laptops, MP3 players or DVD players that are unrelated to driving. We must continue to deter this dangerous behaviour, and motorists who text and drive must be penalized.

In a letter of support, the CAA agreed with this sentiment: “Efforts like safe texting zones would provide motorists with safe, off-road options to use their devices before resuming their travels. This could help reduce the

attraction of using a hand-held device while operating a vehicle."

The Ontario Safety League has also voiced their support for Bill 19. The letter states: "Distracted driving is everywhere. It doesn't matter how many years of experience you have behind the wheel; we are all affected by distracted driving behaviour."

Combatting distracted driving is a non-partisan issue. This is why the opposition and the government all supported Bill 31, the Making Ontario's Roads Safer Act.

I have a couple more letters that I'll save until my final review. But I will say that Karin Ots of Aviva has given a letter of support illustrating how Bill 19 builds upon the distracted-driving measures of the previous bill. It says:

"In 2015, Aviva supported the Ontario government's passing of the Making Ontario Roads Safer Act, which consists of increased fines and assigning demerit points to anyone convicted of distracted driving ... MPP Vic Fedeli's PMB will contribute to the government's efforts to reduce the number of accidents caused by distracted driving."

Karin Ots of Aviva, who's here in the gallery, goes on to give some alarming facts. "Distracted driving deaths have surpassed impaired driving deaths. There is such a stigma with drunk driving, but texting and driving is still relatively socially acceptable. It's not acceptable—it's dangerous and accounts for approximately 25% of all fatal accidents. Aviva Canada hopes that safe texting zones will encourage better behaviour."

Again, I want to reiterate that Bill 19 aims to combat distracted driving through the creation of designated highway texting zones, where a driver is able to stop safely to use a cellphone. It would also require that signs be displayed along our highways to remind drivers that there is a nearby opportunity to legally use their cellphone.

Driving in the province of Ontario is a privilege, not a right.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Michael Mantha: It's great to stand here on behalf of the good people across Algoma-Manitoulin. I'm very glad to address Bill 19, to designate safe zones for texting.

In today's world, we can't repeat enough to our kids to not text and drive. It's certainly similar to the good old, "Don't drink and drive," but texting is a new phenomenon that can't be addressed in the same way as we did with alcohol. We can't stop ourselves from answering that oh-so-important call. We just can't wait that extra little bit to get into that rest station. It's so quick and easy to pick it up.

If only there were safe zones on the side of the road where we could safely stop and take the call and answer the texts. Well, there isn't, and there are none, so, "Maybe if I slow down, I'll be able to take that call or respond to that text." That's not right either. We need to give

them options to stop and text instead of doing this while they're driving.

We also need to have safe roads to drive on in northern Ontario, and that's the reality that I'm going to be touching on for northern Ontarians. We lack the infrastructure. We don't have basic washrooms or rest stations on vast stretches of our highways. The reality is that northerners are frustrated with the basics, and that is, snow removal and proper road maintenance, in addition to safe texting zones.

I want to share a letter with you from Madame Natalie Tessier from Chapleau, who sent this to me because of an incident that happened in Chapleau just last week. She says:

"Dear Mr. Mantha,

"It is with a very heavy heart that I write this letter to you. We are a community in mourning; four of our own are now gone and as a community, we have been marked forever due to this senseless tragedy.

"You cannot imagine how many connections there are between Paulette, Aynsley, Kruz and Jamaal and the people of Chapleau and other communities such as Sault Ste. Marie.

"Now these connections are forever broken. How do we recover from these losses? How do members of the MacLeod and Nakogee families recover from these losses? How does the driver of the transport live with himself after this accident?

"I certainly don't have the answer, but I most certainly do have questions.

"Mr. Mantha, what angers me is that this tragedy could have been avoided. The road was not plowed and the slush on the road was a contributing factor to this accident.

"Can you explain to me why, at 10:40 a.m., the highway between Foleyet and Timmins was not plowed?

"Can you explain to me how privatization has benefited us in this case?

"Can you explain to me why our road standards are"—

Interjection.

Mr. Michael Mantha: That is so rude. Show a little bit of class.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I heard what the minister said.

I'm listening attentively; I think he's staying on course. Continue, member from Algoma-Manitoulin.

Mr. Michael Mantha: "Can you explain to me why, at 10:40 a.m., the highway between Foleyet and Timmins was not plowed?

"Can you explain to me how privatization has benefited us in this case?

"Can you explain to me why our road standards are significantly less than those in southern Ontario and have been reduced when maintenance was privatized?

"Can you explain to me why the road contractors who are delinquent in their contractual obligations to maintain our roads and are fined do not pay their fines and continue to operate with impunity?"

"Mr. Mantha, I would like you to know that I have reached out to you in the past, to the contractor who 'maintains' our northern highways in our area as well as to MTO when I was told by the contractor that the number I was calling ... was the wrong number.

"I have never been given a straight answer from MTO or the contractor about inadequate maintenance, other than we are a 'class 4 highway.'

"What does that even mean? Does this"—

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): All right. I'm just going to ask the member from Algoma-Manitoulin to focus on the texting aspect of the bill that is being presented today.

Mr. Michael Mantha: I am, Mrs. Speaker, and I'm demonstrating the challenges that are there with northern Ontario, because if we can't have safe text zones on the side of the road—we don't even have the roads to drive on, and I need to highlight that. I would like to continue raising this on behalf of my constituents.

"What does that even mean? Does this mean that we are second-class citizens who don't get to benefit from safe roads because we live in northern Ontario?

"Sir, we have no choice but to travel these roads for medical appointments, to meet with a lawyer or accountant or other specialized service, to buy a vehicle or to have a vehicle serviced if there is a recall, to purchase necessities that can't be purchased in our small communities, to drive our children to post-secondary institutions and to have our children travel home on these same roads, and the list goes on.

"Why is it okay for us to put our lives in our own hands due to improperly maintained roads because we live in northern Ontario?"—and put in safe texting zones?

"I was born in northern Ontario and have chosen to live, work and raise my family here. Someone has to live here to harvest lumber, to mine, to manage and protect our natural resources, to look after residents, to educate children, and to populate northern Ontario.

"You get the idea. It angers me when I'm told that if I don't like it, I should move down south.

"Mr. Mantha, I have reached out to you in the past about inadequate road maintenance and that my fear was that there would be a tragedy before it got better.

"Well, unfortunately, as I write this, my prophecy has ... been realized.

"We have had a senseless tragedy that has now marked our community forever. Mr. Mantha, I am asking you to make sure that Queen's Park is aware of this and that changes are put in place so that no community has to suffer like we are now suffering.

"Thank you.

"Natalie Tessier,
"Chapleau."

Madam Speaker, I want safe zones for texting too. What we really want in northern Ontario is also safe roads, so that we could have that shoulder for safe texting as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

1410

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I'm very pleased to speak this afternoon to the private member's bill that was brought forward by the member for Nipissing. I do so in my role as the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Transportation. I assure you, Speaker, and other members of this House, that I will try to stay on topic this afternoon.

I would like to start by thanking the member for bringing this PMB forward. I don't currently see him in the House, but once he gets back, I will be sure to acknowledge him.

Interjections.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): You need to withdraw.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: I will withdraw, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you.

Ms. Daiene Vernile: If passed, Bill 19, the Safe Texting Zones Act, would allow the Minister of Transportation to designate any part of a provincial highway where the shoulder may be used as a texting zone. The driver could then park safely in that zone and use a hand-held device. It would also allow the Lieutenant Governor in Council to make regulations designating commuter and transit lots and rest and service stations as texting zones, for the same purpose as I just highlighted.

Speaker, I know that when we all come together to show our support for making our roads safer, this is a benefit to all Ontarians. Distracted driving is now one of the biggest dangers on our roads. A text can be the difference between life and death.

Our 2013 Ontario Road Safety Annual Report found that in that year alone, inattentive driving was a factor in 16% of all fatalities on Ontario roads. A Centre for Addiction and Mental Health report that came out just this past December found that 37% of Ontario adults admitted to texting while driving at least once in the past year, and 11% did so 30 or more times. But you know what, Speaker? I happen to think that it might even be higher than that. I know that we can all do better.

Based on our experience, it takes a combination of penalties and public education to address dangerous driving behaviours to keep our roads safe. Our record reflects our work to create this comprehensive approach. Year after year, our roads are ranked among the safest in North America—we are second only to the district of Columbia—but it's clear that such a pervasive problem like distracted driving requires strong action.

In 2015, all parties came together in this House to support Bill 31, the Making Ontario's Roads Safer Act. This piece of legislation took distracted driving head on by increasing the fine range from \$60 to \$500 up to \$300 to \$1,000 on conviction. This made Ontario's fine range for distracted driving among the highest in all of Canada.

Charges under the Highway Traffic Act and the Criminal Code of Canada both play an important role in addressing the problem. The careless driving charge in Ontario's Highway Traffic Act carries six demerit points.

Fines of up to \$2,000 are possible and jail time. Police may also lay a charge of dangerous driving under the Criminal Code of Canada, under which drivers could face jail terms and up to five years.

Speaker, as I mentioned previously, it's more than simply a question of penalties. Public education plays a very important role and can help our message reach a much wider range of drivers right across Ontario. Many of you will remember an ad campaign called, "It happens fast. Put down the phone." It ran last summer. This was the largest-ever province-wide distracted driving campaign. The ads were featured on TV and radio, as well as at the movie theatre and online.

The images in those ads were very jarring, as were the stories, but they spoke to the real-life consequences of dangerous driving. The ads also asked viewers and listeners to take a step further and head to social media to tweet their personal commitment to not driving distracted, using the #PutDownThePhone hashtag.

We also continue to work with over 150 road safety partners across the province, including on the issue of distracted driving. Whether it's on social media, that kind of campaign, or going to schools and talking to students about the harms of distracted driving, we continue to find new and innovative ways to get this very important message across, something that wouldn't be possible without our road safety partners.

Speaking of students, we know that our young people are more likely to engage in risky behaviour. The CAMH study that I previously mentioned found that the rates of texting while driving were much higher among younger drivers. This is why, in addition to our outreach targeted at this cohort, we also have escalated sanctions for the first-time novice distracted-driving offender. They face a 30-day licence suspension, a 90-day licence suspension for a second instance, and any further instances can lead to a cancellation of the licence in addition to other sanctions.

Speaker, while we know that the member's bill is meant to address distracted driving—something that members on this side of the House wholly support—I do think that there are some very important implications as well as some existing realities on our roads that we really do need to consider. For example, while this bill would allow for the creation of safe texting zones on the shoulder of highways, it could actually prove to be a distraction for those who are still driving, often at higher speeds.

We know that non-emergency stops on the shoulder of the highway can always be dangerous. There are vehicles that are, in fact, allowed to use the shoulder of the highway currently, including emergency vehicles and MTO enforcement vehicles, as well as certain circumstances, including transit vehicles, road service vehicles and bicycle traffic. How would their ability to travel on the shoulder be impacted by a safe texting zone? I think that we can all agree that this could be especially concerning in the case of emergency vehicles. The time that it takes for a paramedic or firefighter to get to the

scene of an emergency could be the difference between life and death.

We should also recognize the numerous opportunities that drivers already have to take a break to use their phones while travelling to their destinations. There are approximately 185 provincial roadside rest stops, picnic areas, scenic outlooks and other places along the highway. These provide the perfect opportunity to park and safely use your phone. The last point I want to raise is that drivers can already safely use their phones when parked in a transit or a carpool lot, as well as at a service station.

I want to stress again how much we appreciate members who are looking to play a part in our road safety, and especially those who come forward with very unique proposals to do so. Keeping our roads safe is up to each and every one of us, and only by giving it our full attention are we going to keep our roads safe today and make them even safer for tomorrow.

Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to participate and to debate this bill. I'm looking in front of you at the young people who are sitting there—our pages. It's their last day. You're going to be our drivers of tomorrow; I hope you're paying close attention to this PMB today because there's lots of good information.

I look forward to continuing this important dialogue on road safety.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: As always, it's an honour to be able to stand in this House and speak on behalf of the great constituents of Niagara West–Glanbrook. I wish to thank the honourable member from Nipissing for putting forward his private member's bill on such an important issue. This is an issue that, as we've spoken about already in this House, is growing day by day. This is an issue that impacts families, that impacts everyone on the roads, and it impacts a lot of people in very tragic ways—ways that could have been prevented.

It is very important to draw the line and the correlation between drinking and driving and distracted driving, because they're both issues that have had an enormous impact and they are both issues that, unfortunately, our governments, perhaps, have, over decades, taken too long to come to realize what is necessary to prevent these tragic cases that come from either substance abuse or from distracted driving.

As a teen—still being a teen—this is an issue that is perhaps of particular relevance. This is an age in which those who were born after a certain date are known as digital natives, versus digital immigrants. I believe the date is often given as 1990. Those who were born before 1990 are known as tech or digital immigrants, and those born after 1990 are known as tech or digital natives. As a digital native and also our critic for digital government, I have seen and spoken with many teens who speak about the importance of both their G2 or their G or driving as a very important milestone towards becoming an adult, towards taking up the responsibilities that are part of that

growing process, but also who have spoken about the importance of getting their first phone.

1420

I know for me, when I got my first phone, I was 14 years old. That was a huge step toward, perhaps, psychologically recognizing the responsibilities of growing up and entering adulthood. When I first got my G2 and was able to go out and drive by myself, that was another example of another huge milestone on that effort. But those two should not mix. Using your wireless hand-held device can have tragic impact and especially among teens and young adults, who, as the honourable member opposite mentioned, are particularly high-risk when it comes to these sorts of behaviours.

An Ontario study from 2014 noted that for grade 12 students alone, 46% of those who say they drive say they also texted once while operating a vehicle. It's a huge concern for the Ontario Provincial Police, as we've seen from almost a year ago exactly. On March 14, the OPP released a statement saying that distracted driving became the top reason behind fatal road crashes in Ontario: alcohol and impairment had 45 fatalities; seat belt-related had 51 fatalities; speed had 61 fatalities; and distracted driving had 69 fatalities.

If 46% of those who drive say that they had alcohol in their system while driving, we would be absolutely appalled, and rightly so. Seeing that 46% of those who drive say that they were distracted while driving or texted at least once while driving a vehicle should be appalling as well.

The reality is, we live in a highly engaged world. We live in a world where we want instantaneous access and often need instantaneous access, whether that's to social networks or work-related issues. I commend the member from Nipissing for putting forward a private member's bill that recognizes the realities of a world where we are connected and where we often need to remain connected. That means finding not a compromise but a solution to the problem that is presented, and the tragic reality that often occurs from distracted driving.

Putting forward places where people could stop, pull over, where they could have that chance to stop the little blinking red light on their phone and actually answer—whether it's a loved one or whether it's a work-related matter—and know that they would have that opportunity. I know even myself, driving up north and driving some of those distances, you can drive for hours. It's literally hours before finding a rest stop. For some people, that sort of temptation can be too much, unfortunately.

I think simply outlawing it is what we have already done, but the reality is that there are still 46% of grade 12 students, even though it's illegal—six demerit points is an enormous cost—and they still say they are texting while driving, let alone other distracted use. I think coming up with a solution that actually recognizes the reality that people will continue to do this if they don't have these options, as unfortunate as that is, is commendable.

I want to thank, again, my honourable colleague and the member for Nipissing for bringing forward this bill.

I'm very pleased to speak to it and very pleased to support it. I hope we all in this House will stand and support it as a very common-sense, practical solution that will save lives.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: I'm happy to have a chance to talk about this private member's bill and to give it my support. Nothing shows the difference between MPPs representing southern Ontario and MPPs representing northern Ontario like talking about roads.

Let me talk to you about Highway 144. Highway 144 is a highway that links Sudbury to Timmins. Highway 144 is 330 kilometres long. It has no shoulder. I know that you guys who live in southern Ontario have never seen a road like this, because all of your roads have shoulders. Hell, most of your roads have paved shoulders. In northern Ontario, we have no shoulders. So if you're driving up Highway 144 and a moose comes out of the bush and there's a truck coming the other way, you have no place to pull over. It doesn't matter how important it is to pull over; there is no place to do this. If you pull over on Highway 144 more than six inches, we will see you next spring, hopefully, but that's it.

This is our reality. I would say that that makes us really good drivers in northern Ontario. That's why our insurance rates are lower and all this—no, I have no idea. But all I can tell you is that our roads and what we consider a highway in northern Ontario is nothing like what you guys travel on.

What the member from Nipissing is bringing forward is, let's look at this through a view that not all roads are created equally in northern Ontario. For the last two years on Highway 144—and this is why I use it as an example—believe it or not, we have texting zones. We have, about every 15 kilometres or so, a shoulder. We've never had paved shoulders before. We not only have a paved shoulder, but it is flat, and it's big enough for a truck to pull over. We're all using it for the same reason.

Whoever designed this, I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart, because in those places where we actually have a place to pull over, you also have cell service. Throughout Highway 144, your cellphone doesn't work most of the time. But there are a few places where you actually have cell connection, and they have built us those little pull-overs. The trucks use them because the truckers know that if you have 100 campers behind you, it's not always a good thing. They will try to pass where there is no passing lane, and they will try to do all things.

For the last two years—we are the first ones to have texting zones. I'm sort of proud because it's my riding of Nickel Belt. I'm very proud of this. It helps. It makes things safer. I can tell you, I use this highway lots to go to Ivanhoe Lake, Foleyet, Mattagami, Gogama, Biscotasing, Westree, Shining Tree—all of those places in my riding, including Cartier, are all on Highway 144. I use Highway 144 lots to service the people who live in Nickel Belt. We use them.

If the weather is really bad and the traffic is very slow because I'm stuck behind three trucks that are crawling along, I pull over in those safe texting zones and I text my husband: "Don't worry. I know that it is late. I was supposed to be home for supper at 6; enjoy your supper by yourself one more time. I won't be home until about 10 or 11 because the traffic on Highway 144 is very slow."

He doesn't like having supper by himself when I'm supposed to be there, especially not doing the dishes by himself. But the fact that I was able to pull over, the fact that I'm able to send a text home to let him know not to worry, is a game-changer. Before we had those little pull-over safe texting zones, he would worry—like everybody else would—because you expect your loved one to be home, and they're not.

The idea that he puts forward is an idea worth looking at. Let's roll it out on the roads where it makes sense. You will save lives. You will make life easier for people in northern Ontario. It will all be worth it.

By the way, the corner of Highway 560 and Highway 144 has such huge potholes. It needs to be fixed. I just thought I would put that on the record. If the Minister of Transportation is listening—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. Further debate.

1430

Mr. Harinder S. Takhar: I want to thank the member from Nipissing for bringing this bill. I think it's a good bill. The intention of the bill is good. Distracted driving has always been an issue. It was an issue when I was the Minister of Transportation. It is an issue now, and I'm sure that this will be an issue going forward as well.

What is distracted driving? It's reading emails; it's fiddling with telephones; it's fiddling with your radio; it's looking at the newspaper cuttings once in a while. Even when I was the Minister of Transportation, they used to say that when people put on makeup in the car, that's also distracted driving. Yes, of course, I think that texting is distracted driving.

But having said all that, a lot has been done by our government to address the safety issues. I brought a bill that included children's safety seats and impaired driving, but we can always do more.

Having said all that, I also want to say that our roads have been the safest in North America. The first time it became so was in 2006—again, I was the Minister of Transportation at that time—and since then, we have maintained that. That doesn't mean that we can't do more. We should always do more.

I think this bill actually moves us in the right direction. Technology has become an integral part of our lives. People want to stay connected. If we can find a place where we can text, look at our emails or make the telephone calls we need to make, those are good things.

Madam Speaker, my understanding is that MTO is currently working on a pilot project in partnership with one of our road safety partners, the Ontario Provincial

Police. It's called Text Stop, safety signing at four highway service centres across the province. I think that is the right step to take: do a pilot project and see whether it's successful or not.

Texting zones is not a new idea. This is an idea that's used in the US. You go on to US highways; it's all over. Every so many miles, you can pull off along the side road and you can do the texting.

The only concern I have is whether pulling off onto the shoulder is the right thing to do or not. Pulling off at a safe place is the right thing to do. So we need to find out what the safe places are that people can pull off and text.

From that point of view, I want to say that there are already approximately 185 provincial roadside rest stops and picnic areas on our highways. The intention of those is for people to step back, relax a little bit and do the things they need to do.

Madam Speaker, I am very supportive of this bill. I'm very supportive of the intention of this bill. I would just like to say that maybe the shoulder is not the right place. We need to find a safe place where we can actually do the texting or make telephone calls or whatever we need to do.

Again, I want to thank the member for bringing this bill. I think it's the right bill. It has the right intention, and anything we can do to improve the safety of our roads, it's our duty to do as legislators.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise today and speak on the safe texting zones bill that was put forward by the member from Nipissing from the Progressive Conservative caucus.

We are hearing a lot of support today for having better safety on our roads due to distracted driving. We are all aware that there is a strong stigma against driving under the influence of alcohol, but we seem to find that it's still socially acceptable to engage in distracted driving, whether it's cellphones, tablets or, as the member opposite just spoke about, putting on makeup, which I have to admit I've done a couple of times—put on lipstick at a red light—probably not supposed to. But we have people who aren't aware that they have to really focus on the road and that they're driving—I used to say to my kids when they were starting to drive, "You're driving a tank, and you have to be aware. It could change somebody's life, including yours, in a heartbeat if you're not paying attention."

We see too often rubbernecking. Just yesterday it was on the news as I was driving home that an SUV hit a police officer who was pulled over with all his lights flashing because apparently they suspect that the driver was rubbernecking to see an accident on the other side of the road.

We see people even walking while texting. Even here in the halls of Queen's Park, I've been known to walk in the hall—I'm sure, looking at my phone, as the rest of you have—and almost bump into other people. We have to be careful when we're moving, any time we're moving—in a car is obviously far more dangerous.

I used to say to my kids, when I would drive the minivan in the old days, when they were young and still living at home, that my minivan is not a moving family room. But they never really believed me. They certainly thought it was. We had the video that came down—there are movies that I have heard many times that I've never actually seen. They expected to have food and entertainment. This is kind of a problem, because the parents are driving and often the kids are asking for things. When we were younger we had to entertain ourselves and stay quiet. Somehow we are constantly entertaining our kids and they're used to it, and I think it makes it tough to try to get them to understand the dangers of their behaviour.

We're talking about creating safe texting zones on our highways. One of the challenges is that in many areas across the province—and we forget in the GTA how enormous this province is—we're hearing from the members of northern communities that they don't have cellphone coverage. That's a discussion for another private member's bill on another day, but there isn't actually cellphone coverage, and I suspect that they're driving along and glancing constantly at their phone to see if they're in an area where there is coverage. So they need to be told, "This is an area where there is coverage and, just up ahead, in this many metres or kilometres, there's an area where you can safely pull over"—not on the shoulder, as the member from the Liberal Party was just talking about; nobody is suggesting having people pull over on the shoulder. The whole point is that they shouldn't have to pull over on the shoulder. They shouldn't have to wonder if this area has cellphone coverage or not. They should have signs indicating a rest area of some kind—maybe even a garbage can, a picnic area, a water fountain, and a lot of things like a washroom would be very nice in those areas—to be aware of where those cellphone coverages are up ahead, to be told it's in 10 kilometres or 20 kilometres, and then given another warning a kilometre or two ahead so as to be able to pull over very safely.

The idea came to my colleague when he was driving in Pennsylvania and in New York state, which have rest areas with cellphone coverage. He felt that that's what was needed since he represents Nipissing, which is a northern riding in Canada.

We have Canada Road Safety Week just before Victoria Day every year, and we try to do that education as legislators. The CAA, the Ontario Safety League—these are all organizations that are trying to ensure that the public is after on our roads, yet still people don't always get the message.

I'm reminded of the kid on the signs on the construction sites—I'm sure you've all seen them. It's this cute little boy, and he says, "My dad works here," to remind people that these are people with families. They're not some kind of video-game, realistic-looking images; these are actual human beings, and we have to be far more careful when we're on our roads.

There are 185 or more already existing areas in the province, but in a province this enormous, that's really just a drop of water in the ocean. I think we need far

more areas and better signage to warn people when there are safe texting areas. There are existing areas—commuter parking lots, transit stations, rest stops—we could use, but the whole point is that people have to know that those areas are coming up ahead.

Again, I want to all of us to spread the message as much as we can and support this initiative by my colleague. We're looking forward to hearing from people from the communities at committee.

I'm just reminded of an old song from the 1950s by Paul Evans, Seven Little Girls: "Keep your mind on your drivin' / Keep your hands on the wheel / Keep your snoopy eyes on the road ahead."

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'll return back to the member from Nipissing to wrap up.

Mr. Victor Fedeli: I want to thank the members from Algoma-Manitoulin, Kitchener Centre, Niagara West-Glanbrook, Nickel Belt, Mississauga-Erindale and Thornhill.

I want to clarify right off the bat: I'm not quite sure where the thought is that this is going to require people to park on the shoulder, at a guardrail. I honestly don't know where that came from. This does not create any new pull-offs, nor does this allow anyone to park on a shoulder.

As I said—and as I said last year when I brought this—this uses the 185 existing roadside parking places, the rest stops, all the turnoffs that are already existing. This a signage program, as opposed to the thought that it creates some kind of risky parking on the side of a road that was outlined by a couple of the members.

1440

I also want to speak to the member from Nickel Belt: I have driven that road several times and in fact, only two weeks ago, at the end of that road, I pulled over safely and photographed three moose on that road and tweeted a photo of it. I'm very familiar with the problems. I applaud your comments, as well as those of the member from Algoma, about the north. Those turnoffs you spoke about, that we love: This makes use of those turnoffs, but labels them as such. Five kilometres ahead, somebody could see a sign that tells them, perhaps, that in five kilometres there's going to be a turnoff that you can feel safe using.

Speaker, I want to thank everybody in the Legislature who spoke so favourably about this bill, and I thank you for the opportunity today.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): We will vote on this item at the end of private members' public business.

FREE MY RYE ACT (LIQUOR STATUTE LAW AMENDMENT), 2017

LOI DE 2017 SUR LA VENTE LIBRE DE WHISKY (MODIFIANT DES LOIS EN CE QUI CONCERNE LES BOISSONS ALCOOLIQUES)

Mr. Clark moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 50, An Act to amend the Liquor Control Act and the Liquor Licence Act with respect to the sale of spirits / Projet de loi 50, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les alcools et la Loi sur les permis d'alcool en ce qui concerne la vente de spiritueux.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to standing order 98, the member has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Steve Clark: I want to begin by giving credit where credit is due for Bill 50, the Free My Rye Act (Liquor Statute Law Amendment), 2017. When our former leader Tim Hudak left this place last year, I was honoured that he entrusted his Free My Rye Act to me. If you know Tim, you know he's passionate about a lot of things, but if you really want to get him going, ask him about the incredible spirits, beer and wine we produce in Ontario. It's truly world-class, and the success is something I think we all in this chamber should celebrate.

Ever the optimist, Tim saw the potential to grow the industry even more. That means creating jobs, driving investment into our communities and bringing more international attention and acclaim to these Ontario-made products. So when the government stole a bit of my thunder with an announcement Tuesday, I thought about my friend Tim when considering my ballot spot: Should I take the fact that they have committed to adopting parts of Free My Rye as a win and debate something else, or should I proceed?

I knew, Speaker, what the former member from Niagara West–Glanbrook would say. He'd tell me to press on and not just to settle. He'd want me to shine the spotlight on the incredible craft distillers in every corner of Ontario and to talk about how we can help nurture the sector's growth, to see more distilleries go from planning into production. For me, that's what this afternoon's debate is all about: growing the industry and our province's reputation for grain-to-glass spirits.

I want to talk about my own producer, King's Lock Craft Distillery, in Johnstown. King's Lock founders Laura Bradley, Joey Kelly and Rob Heuvel have been so supportive in helping me understand the industry. I attended the grand opening of their beautiful location last summer. Hearing them talk passionately about their dreams for their business, and what it means for the local food scene in Leeds–Grenville, is the reason I'm so eager to take the reins of Free My Rye.

I also want to give the government credit for the measures announced this week. The proposed rebate and other steps are improvements from where we were with Bill 70 last fall. Ontario Craft Distillers Association president Mike Heisz called it "a good step forward to improve the competitive landscape for Ontario craft distillers and we thank them for this program."

But what Mike went on to say is the reason I'm urging members in the chamber this afternoon to support Bill 50. He said the OCDA looks forward to working with the government to make "further changes to bring greater choice to Ontario's spirits consumers while continuing to drive the growth of our Ontario small businesses." I

believe those additional changes Mike is referring to are found in the Free My Rye Act, and I'm so pleased that OCDA is publicly supporting Bill 50.

Let me quote from their media release issued yesterday: "The Ontario Craft Distillers Association is in favour of the proposals put forward in Bill 50, and strongly encourages all parts of the government to examine the potential benefits that can be gained in Ontario by implementing the key tenets of the bill, including 'by the glass' sales of spirits at distillery retail stores."

"The improvements to date, including the retail store taxation, the rebate program, and direct delivery to licensees, have been positive initial steps forward supporting Ontario's craft spirits."

"However, there still remains a much greater opportunity to improve the availability of Ontario craft spirits to consumers. The OCDA asks the Legislature to refer this bill to committee and looks forward to working closely with the government within that process to facilitate the remaining change needed in this industry."

I read that full statement so MPPs understand that there is industry support for Bill 50. Free My Rye proposes to grow Ontario's craft distillery sector through four measures:

(1) Increased access for consumers: The bill amends section 3 of the Liquor Control Act to require the LCBO to increase the number of stores where spirits are sold by at least 20% within five years. Obviously, we can't grow the industry if we're limiting retail options for craft spirits.

(2) Improved tax incentives: Bill 50 proposes to introduce three categories of a graduated or volumetric tax rate for spirits sold at a distillery retail store or the LCBO. I'm going to go just quickly through the rates: It's 10% for the first 50,000 litres sold in the year at the store, 20% for that part sold in the year in excess of 50,000 litres up to 100,000 litres, and finally, 40% on the sales in excess of 100,000 litres up to 625,000 litres.

I know the government members might tell me that a \$4.42-per-litre rebate on its 61.5%-per-bottle tax provides incentive. Yes, it's better than what we saw back in December, but I question whether a three-year commitment to a rebate program provides enough incentive for a craft distiller to reinvest and to grow—or a new potential distiller who wanted to make that leap.

Instead, I look at the tremendous growth in jurisdictions that have been aggressive in reducing the tax burden on locally produced spirits. Nova Scotia, in 2014, announced several tax incentives, including reducing the 160% markup per bottle to between 60% and 80%. An additional 10% reduction was available to producers who used Nova Scotia agricultural products.

You might want to ask me, Speaker: What happened?

Mr. Lou Rinaldi: What happened?

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you, Mr. Rinaldi.

A CBC national report last December said the province now might have more distillers per capita than anywhere in Canada. Incredibly, the Nova Scotia Liquor Corp. reported that sales for the last quarter of 2015 tripled over the previous year.

In the US and BC, graduated tax policies resulted in an explosion of distillery start-ups. That's the kind of potential that I think exists in the province of Ontario.

The challenge, as Laura Bradley at King's Lock has stressed to me over and over again, is the staggering upfront costs that go with opening a distillery. So much of every dollar they bring in goes to paying off those start-up costs that they have to be modest in expanding and in hiring.

Remember: Even with a three-year rebate program, a new Ontario distiller still faces a tremendous tax burden. That's the advantage that Free My Rye has over the reforms announced this week. Those measures help established craft distilleries, but adopting Bill 50 will encourage new distillers to get into the market. The government still gets its share, an increasingly larger one as the business grows.

There are two other measures in Free My Rye, Speaker. Another one allows sales by the glass. The highlight of visiting a winery or brewery in Ontario is tasting what they make. It makes no sense that I can stop in to see my friend Bruce Davis at Gananoque Brewing Company and sample a beer, but I can't try a sample cocktail at King's Lock. The government's announcement speaks to moving towards allowing distillers to have a bar or restaurant on site. But let's face it, opening a bar or restaurant is a long way from simply giving them the opportunity to provide samples.

1450

Finally, cutting out the middleman: This is a prime example of cleaning up the ridiculous red tape distillers face. I've heard from distillers who have a bar around the corner who would love that bar to feature their product. But instead of just walking a case over, they must go through the LCBO, which I think we all realize is an onerous process that can take up to four weeks.

The government has signalled an intention to allow direct sales, but there's no timeline, no legislative change that I've seen or anybody in the industry has seen. Bill 50 provides both the timeline and the necessary legislative amendments.

Speaker, I recognize it can get complicated, talking about tax rates, access to markets and on-site sales. Lots of numbers; lots of regulations. So let's boil the debate down to the basic issue at hand. Imagine a glass of VQA wine, a pint of craft beer or a shot of King's Lock 1000 Islands Moonshine on the table. It's all alcohol, but two of those products are treated so much more preferentially by Ontario liquor laws than spirits. I know my friend Jan Westcott at Spirits Canada would remind me that this unequal treatment extends to all spirits, not just those that are made by small independent distillers. I ask the government to explain what's inhibiting them moving to parity? We need to even the playing field, and Bill 50 gives us just that opportunity.

My message today is the same message that I read out from the president of the Ontario Craft Distillers Association: Let's get this bill into committee. Let's put my proposals on the table and the government's ideas as

well and the third party's ideas as well. Let's move it forward. We can hear from craft distillers. We can work together on a package of reforms which I think would give us the opportunity to unleash the amazing potential for growth in this industry.

I had the great opportunity to go to the AGM of the Ontario Craft Distillers Association. They're a very, very enthusiastic group, extremely resourceful. Some of what they said to me is that they encourage members from all three parties to go and look at the distillers in their riding, meet with them, talk to them about their challenges in setting up a small operation and really get a sense of the great opportunity that we've got.

We can look at other jurisdictions. We can look at Nova Scotia or British Columbia. We can look south of the border, in the US, to see how a progressive tax policy can make this industry grow and grow.

I want to leave members with the words of the Ontario Craft Distillers Association: "The OCDA asks the Legislature to refer this bill to committee and looks forward to working closely with the government within that process to facilitate the remaining change needed in this industry."

The government made its announcement a couple of days ago. The industry sent them a very nice thank-you for that. They were very supportive. What we need now is all three parties to support the next round of changes, the next opportunity to grow this business. I ask people to support Bill 50.

I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity today, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate? I recognize the member from Windsor-Tecumseh.

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Why, thank you, Speaker. It's always a pleasure to be called upon by you in this provincial Parliament to speak in the House on behalf of my great constituents in Windsor-Tecumseh, in this case especially so, since my riding is the home of one of the oldest distilleries in Ontario.

Hiram Walker bought some land along the Canadian side of the Detroit River in 1856. That's right, more than 150 years ago. He started distilling whisky a couple of years later. Hiram Walker was a man of great vision. He knew that in order to succeed he needed to attract and keep good people. So he paid them well. He built brick homes, subsidized their rents, paved the roads, installed streetlights, endowed schools and helped fund a hospital. He made sure there was a fire department and a police service. Thus, the town of Walkerville was born.

Since 1882, Hiram Walker's Club brand of whiskey has been a top seller in the United States and Canada. In 1886, the brand became Canadian Club.

There's an old story to that: The story goes that American distillers, jealous of competing with the better whiskey, wanted to tarnish the reputation of Canadian Club by lobbying Washington to make sure that everyone knew they were buying Canadian whiskey instead of American whiskey. In other words, the labels on the

bottles had to show that the contents were Canadian-made. But since Canadian Club was so popular and better than anything that the Americans had to offer, the sales actually went up. It opened the door for other Canadian distillers to sell more of their branded products across the border as well.

After Hiram Walker died, family members ran the distillery until 1926, when it was sold to Harry Hatch. His son Clifford took it over in 1964. Cliff Hatch was a true gentleman, a philanthropist and a community builder. I was proud to know him. We now have the city-owned Joan and Clifford Hatch Wildflower Garden along the shores of the Detroit River, just west of the distillery. In 1987, Allied Lyons bought out the Hatch family, and then they sold it to Pernod Ricard in 2005.

The iconic neon Canadian Club sign on top of the grain elevators on Riverside Drive is gone now. That happened when the brand, the Canadian Club brand, was parcelled off when Pernod Ricard took over and sold it to Beam, which is now Beam Suntory, an American/Japanese company. Pernod Ricard, based in France, owns Hiram Walker, which in turn—I know this gets a bit complicated—owns 51% of Corby Spirit and Wine Ltd. Corby owns the Wiser's brand and contracts with Hiram Walker to produce its distilled spirits at the Walkerville plant.

As I say, the big Canadian Club sign is long gone. The signage along Riverside Drive lets people know that the plant now distills Wiser's products. Just downriver in Amherstburg, in the riding of Essex, we have a Diageo Canada distillery. The Amherstburg plant is where your Crown Royal comes from, Speaker.

Elsewhere in Ontario, Forty Creek, which is now owned by Gruppo Campari of Italy, comes from Grimsby. Then, finally, we have the Canadian Mist plant up in Collingwood, which is owned by Brown-Forman of Louisville, Kentucky.

Just so you know, Speaker, distilled spirits in my area is big business. The Hiram Walker and Diageo plants are responsible for most of the beverage alcohol exports out of Ontario and out of Canada. Those two plants account for two-thirds of all beverage alcohol exports and do about \$700 million in business each and every year. Any bill that comes before this House that deals with distilled spirits is important to the people in my area.

We probably don't think about it enough, but how do we get distilled spirits? Well, the minister knows. Farmers grow the products: the grains, the malts, the barleys, the corn. It's grown locally in Essex county, and it is big business.

These distilled products are mostly sold at LCBO stores in Ontario or on site at the distillers. The LCBO staff are trained and have good-paying, unionized jobs. They help keep our community safe. They screen IDs for underage, would-be consumers. They refuse to sell to those who are clearly inebriated.

This bill, according to some critics, is yet another attempt by the Conservatives to privatize public services by stealth. I have great respect—great respect—for the member from Leeds—Grenville.

Mr. Steve Clark: Oh—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: He knows that, Speaker.

At one time, he was the youngest mayor ever elected in Ontario. He's a former president of AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. He is one of the more informed members in this House, but, in this case, I believe him to be on the wrong side of the issue.

1500

The bill gives the government five years to start selling hard liquor at 20% more locations. I believe we have something like 654 LCBO stores in Ontario, and another 212 LCBO agency stores. We're talking about, what, 175 new outlets over the next five years? I admit, I don't know what the LCBO has in the books for planned expansions, but, in any event, Bill 50 doesn't say, "Open up 20% more LCBO stores." It doesn't say, "These sales would fall under the jurisdiction of trained LCBO staff."

My fear is that in order to comply with the intent of this direction, we'd see people selling booze who haven't had the training and are more interested in profit than in keeping our communities safe. For me, that's the poison pill, if you will, in the bill that leads me to oppose it.

Personally, I like some aspects of the bill. For one thing, I don't think it's fair, to be honest with you, that those who make hard liquor in this province pay twice as much tax to the Liberal government than those who brew beer, and pay four times as much tax to the Liberal government than those who make wine. I don't think that's right. I don't think that's fair. This should be an issue of fairness. I can't support the member who put this bill in front of us this afternoon on this issue.

Speaker, I bumped into you at lunch down in the cafeteria—which reminds me, just outside, I was raising the spirits of cafeteria workers who have been on strike now for more than a month. They're out of the University of Toronto Scarborough. There are about 50 of them out there, half the number of last week, because one of their units has settled. Their workers are members of UNITE HERE Local 75. The reason they were out there, Speaker, trying to raise their spirits—and this bill is about spirits—is because they have to put up with poverty-wage jobs on campus.

Their workers earn about \$11 an hour. One worker I was talking to, shaking hands with, has been there for 14 years, and he's still only earning about \$11.40 an hour. They've been out there for about a month in the cold to bring attention to the situation. Their employer is a subcontractor of the University of Toronto. As long as the universities and other companies in Ontario subcontract out to the lowest bidder, the subcontractor that they give the contract to will be able to offer poverty-level wages.

I hear they're going back to the table on Tuesday. We wish them well. We'll be following their bargaining. Our employment laws in Ontario are so out of date. We haven't seen meaningful changes to legislation in over 20 years, and that's why employers are allowed to get away with poverty wages.

I'm just wrapping up, but, Speaker, you know as I know that we've made several announcements in this regard within the NDP. We want to see a \$15 minimum wage. We want to make it easier for people to join a union and get the first contract, and we'll continue to speak up and support those hard-working people who were out there today. We're proud to do that because it's the right thing to do.

Thank you for your time today, Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this piece of legislation. The growth of Ontario's craft distillers is an issue that I remain actively seized with since last year, more or less around the time that Yongehurst Distillery moved into the riding of Davenport.

I feel strongly about this bill because of the relationship I've had with Yongehurst Distillery in my great riding of Davenport. Yongehurst is a fantastic craft distiller that makes some amazing products, from a limoncello that is consistently sold out to their Harbour Rum that my staff and several more reputable reviewers have called world class.

I appreciate the member opposite's commitment to growing the craft distillery industry; however, the government of Ontario has already taken steps to support small distillers across the province. I was proud to join the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Agriculture earlier this week, along with the member for Beaches-East York, to announce our plan. Our plan is one that focuses on helping small businesses directly. Our small cidery and small distillery support program will contribute up to \$4.9 million to the industry over the next three years. Distilleries like Yongehurst, as a producer, could receive up to \$220,000 per year.

While this bill may have its heart in the right place, its head clearly isn't. The bill before us aims to give tax breaks to every spirit product—big brand or craft-made, imported or domestic, grain-to-glass or bulk-bottled—on the first 830,000 bottles, which is equivalent to about 625,000 litres, they sell through the LCBO.

Madam Speaker, I want to grow the Yongehursts of this province, but we have gone even further than that. Last year, with Bill 70, we improved margins for craft distillers at their on-site store, improving margins from 39% to 45%. The industry told us that there was a problem, and we listened. We heard from the Ontario Craft Distillers Association that they welcome this support, and we are proud to be moving forward with these investments to help support small cider producers and craft distillers.

We have covered that our plan is better targeted than the bill before us and is supported by industry, but what if I told you that you could see the success paying off before our eyes? In 2011, there were no craft distillers in the province of Ontario; now there are more than 22 distilleries operating across the province. My hope is that our new program will help support businesses all across

this province. As a parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Economic Development and Growth, job creation across this province is also very important.

So, Madam Speaker, I've outlined our plan. It is full-bodied, substantial and with a pleasing aftertaste. I have been searching for a term for the bill before us, and the term is "heads." In distilling, the first drops you extract from the process smell awful, taste worse and are poisonous if consumed. You really only get them if you rush something out the door before you've taken the time and care to do the work properly. This bill before the House is the "heads" of the legislative process. I would invite the members opposite to reject drinking something that is just going to make them sick.

This is an issue that I'm going to continue to advocate for. I've had the pleasure of writing to the Minister of Finance on this particular issue and will continue to advocate, supporting the craft distillery industry. I'm sure that I will be writing him more, thanking him and his team for taking the time to distill this province a plan that will bring new life to the aqua vitae industry.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Lisa MacLeod: I'm pleased to join in on this important debate from the member from Leeds-Grenville on this Free My Rye Act, which was initially brought forward by one of my dear friends, Tim Hudak, who was the previous MPP for Niagara West-Glanbrook and the former leader of the Progressive Conservative Party.

I am supporting this for a couple of reasons. One, I think it is excellent for agriculture. Last night I was in Ottawa in my own community with the cattlemen's association. They were partnering with Spirits Canada because there is a symbiotic relationship there that is important, one that we should not only respect, but encourage. I think that this bill does that. It would be useful if the Minister of Agriculture thought about that.

Secondly, I want to talk about fairness. I want to talk about fairness and I want to talk about it in the context of small craft distillers, small craft breweries and small independent wineries, like we have in eastern Ontario. I want to tell you this because—I want to slip in a bit about wineries here.

We have about 14 wineries in and outside of Ottawa. They use a heartier grape. They are discriminated against by the LCBO and the VQAO. This is one of the initiatives that I want to bring forward. I'm happy that my colleague from Leeds-Grenville is bringing this initiative forward because we have a distillery in the city of Ottawa called North of 7 Distillery. It actually happens to be in Ottawa-Vanier. I believe they're worthy of support. I think it's important that members across this community try to support that economic development. But that economic development isn't just happening in Ottawa's most urban riding, it's supporting eastern Ontario agriculture, and that's important.

Now, I don't have much time, but I do want to close on this. I originally come from Nova Scotia. My colleague from Leeds-Grenville talked about the wonderful

impact that the distilleries have had on the agricultural community in Nova Scotia and how that's worked with the Nova Scotia Liquor Corp. The other thing that Nova Scotia does very well, if you go to the Robert Stanfield airport, you will see a little boutique called Liquid Assets. What they do is they go to the craft brewers, the craft distillers and the small wineries and they stock their products. Pride in Nova Scotia is what they're selling, and those products are getting a great marketable name in an international airport.

1510

I want to tell you, Speaker, that just yesterday, I spoke with representatives of the Ottawa airport to see if we can do the same thing for Ottawa and eastern Ontario, so that his distillery, her distillery and the distilleries in our community, as well as the wineries and the craft breweries, have an international market right in our airport.

The reality is that our liquor laws are so outdated. I'm sure they laugh at us in Florida. I'm sure they laugh at us in Alberta. I think it behooves the government of the day to actually get with the times, because guess what? After all, it's 2017.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

M^{me} France Gélinas: It is a rather interesting debate that we're having this afternoon on a private member's bill called the Free My Rye Act. I must say that, coming from health promotion, this is not the type of health promotion initiative that I would like to push forward. Free my rye, free my ride—the issue of drinking and driving is certainly always front of mind when, like me, you come from health promotion.

I can tell you the stories of Jazmine Houle, 15 years old, Steven Phillippe, 16 years old, and Caitlin Jelley, 15 years old, who were killed on Father's Day in my riding in Hanmer because of a drunk driver. I want to make sure that whenever we deal with our liquor laws, we do this in a way that is conscious of some of the dangers that come with it. As sad as this may be, taxation is a useful deterrent to alcohol consumption. The more expensive it is, the less people drink it.

I do support my colleague from Windsor–Tecumseh's comments when he talks about fair taxation and when he talks about why it is that spirits are taxed four times more than beer, more than wine, and that there is room in there to do better. Yes, I agree: There is room in there to do better. But at the same time, whichever step we take forward, we have to put this through a lens of health promotion to make sure that we do not, by our action, encourage people to continue to use alcohol, to abuse alcohol, because we know the human impact and the human cost of use and abuse of alcohol.

Is there room for improvement? Yes, there is, but I'm not sure that this bill has found the right balance.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I have a new title today: the minister of wine, beer and spirits. It will give me the opportunity to spend some time this afternoon.

Joseph P. Kennedy had a great saying, after his son was elected president in 1960. He said, "Ladies and

gentlemen, victory has 1,000 fathers, and defeat is an orphan." When you look at the 1,000 fathers that we have here for this particular initiative—we have the members from Dufferin–Caledon, Niagara Falls, Beaches–East York, Leeds–Grenville and Davenport. I just want to get all of the folks on the record today who have had their hand in doing this.

This is a very important industry in the province of Ontario. I had the opportunity to meet with the Minister of Finance this week when we made the announcement. I just want to get on the record. I know there's a lot of people tuning in from Peterborough this afternoon. It's channel 95 on Cogeco. Adjust your sets. I know they're watching.

We have a craft distillery in Peterborough, Persian Empire. My friend Bruce who founded it—it's an interesting story. His family came from Iran when the Shah was deposed. They brought their family to Canada and set up Persian Empire in the great city of Peterborough. It's a wonderful organization, and they're doing very well.

I know that Bruce was beyond enthusiastic when we made this announcement the other day, because he reminded me—I want to thank Bruce for this—that back in 2011, there were zero craft distilleries in the province Ontario, and by 2016 that had grown to 21.

I always like to get another Peterborough plug in. We have two great craft beer operators in Peterborough too. I say to my friend from Prince Edward–Hastings that he should drop by. The Publican House is excellent; Smithworks is excellent. If he drops by, the tab's on me. The tab's on me if he wants to drop by.

Mr. Todd Smith: I'll be there.

Hon. Jeff Leal: It is so important—

Mr. Percy Hatfield: Caucus meeting.

Hon. Jeff Leal: I hear my friend from Windsor–Tecumseh. I could tell my own stories, because I'm a graduate of the Odette business school. I could tell my own stories about Hiram Walker. But I've got to stay focused this afternoon on this bill, which is the Free My Rye Act.

This is an amazing opportunity for agriculture in the province of Ontario. Just the other day, I had the opportunity to meet with the apple growers, and they are so enthusiastic about this kind of opportunity.

Of course, agriculture contributes \$36 billion to the economy of the province of Ontario. Madam Speaker, at 5:30 this morning, 800,000 Ontarians were getting up to pursue their careers in agriculture. I know that a lot of them were growing corn and barley and apples to make sure that we can continue to expand the craft cideries and craft distilleries in the province of Ontario. In fact, these two areas are going to offer great export potential in the years to come. It's driving an industry that's so successful. I know that all of us together are so supportive of what we're doing for craft cideries and craft distilleries in the province of Ontario.

Remember, Madam Speaker, the immortal words of Joseph P. Kennedy: Victory does have 1,000 fathers.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate? I recognize the member for Prince Edward-Hastings.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and I still recognize you with your new glasses.

Listen, I have been working on this file since I was elected back in 2011. I introduced a bill, after a lot of conversation, called the Raise a Glass to Ontario Act. That was in early 2014. We debated it here in the Legislature and it had full support.

The reason why this was so important to me was because of the region that I come from: Prince Edward-Hastings, and specifically Prince Edward county, although we're starting to see more and more craft brewers and distilleries pop up right across my riding.

I went to great lengths to try and understand what kind of a mess exists in our beverage alcohol sector in Ontario. It's a mess. If you were ever going to start a beverage alcohol sector, I think what you should do is probably blow this one up and start over again, because it's just absolutely atrocious, the amount of red tape that you have to deal with in this industry.

So I commend my friend from Leeds-Grenville for bringing this piece of legislation forward, the Free My Rye Act, following in the footsteps of Tim Hudak. But there have been many pieces of legislation, including my own Raise a Glass to Ontario Act, that were meant to deal with the red tape that occurs within this industry.

After meeting with the wineries in Prince Edward county and Niagara and with craft brewers here in Toronto and right across the province, and distillers in Prince Edward county and in Collingwood, and those who operate cideries, like the late Grant Howes in Prince Edward county, who was a great friend to many of us here in the Legislature and just recently passed away over the holidays—all of those people gave me so much information about what's wrong with the current state of affairs with the Ministry of Finance and why the province of Ontario continues to heap burden on top of these people instead of just opening up the industry and allowing them to create jobs, which they want to do.

What has been happening is, that pieces of the Raise a Glass to Ontario Act that I introduced back in 2014 have been adopted by the government; many of them have been adopted by the government. It's been interesting to watch them strategically use these pieces of legislation that were meant to reduce red tape in the beverage alcohol sector to cover up some of their own miscues, or maybe some things that they didn't want to see happening.

I remember when they announced that they were going to allow beer and wine to be sold in grocery stores. You remember what happened that same day, Madam Speaker? That very same day was the day they announced they were selling off Hydro One. But when they did their announcement—and they did the two announcements together—did they have, on the big screen in behind at the grocery store, “Hey, we're selling Hydro One, one of the most popular things to ever happen in the

province of Ontario”? No. They said, “We're opening up the market to sell beer and wine in grocery stores.”

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They've used this beverage alcohol sector as a distraction from a lot of other things that they've been doing, and using it to try and maybe bury in the news—because everybody loves to talk about the beverage alcohol sector. The media loves to talk about it. They love to talk about it.

One of the distillers that I met in my riding was 66 Gilead Distillery. It's a craft distillery. It's located in Prince Edward county, in Bloomfield, at 66 Gilead Road. I met with Sophia Pantazi and her husband, Peter Stroz, and they're actually doctors here in Toronto, but they bought this old hops farm in Bloomfield and they turned it into distillery—a beautiful, beautiful spot, if you get the opportunity to go there.

They talked to me all time about how difficult it was for them to make a go of it because of the burden on them placed by the Ministry of Finance. Let me just quote this story that was written in the Wellington Times—great newspaper. Rick Conroy wrote this. He said, “Sophia Pantazi and Peter Stroz founded the county's first and only spirits maker six years ago—an impossible slog through enough regulation to ensnare an agitated rhinoceros.”

These are the kinds of hurdles, obstacles and red tape that they were forced to deal with in this industry. They eventually sold it, and I wish the new owners the best of luck. They've changed the name to Kindred, House of Fine Spirits. It sounds really nice. I had a chance to meet with Jeremiah Soucie, one of the four owners of this facility, and I wished him the best of luck.

They're taking some baby steps over there on the other side. I don't know why they just didn't adopt the Free My Rye Act. That's what they should be doing instead of just announcing a couple of one-offs yesterday or the day before. I thought it was so interesting the other day when the ministers were there making the announcement and they had the two craft distillers standing beside them. They said, “Well, why don't you hold up some of your products?” They were at the LCBO, right? They said, “We're not in the LCBO.”

It's like trying to ensnare an agitated rhinoceros to get your stuff in the LCBO, and that's part of the problem here in Ontario. If we want to grow the jobs in the agriculture industry, if we want to grow the jobs in the beverage alcohol sector, we need to unwrap that red tape. They're doing it a little bit, but they could do it a lot more if they adopted the Free My Rye Act put forward by Mr. Clark here today.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Arthur Potts: Obviously it gives me great pleasure to have a chance to speak to Bill 50, the Free My Rye Act. In the previous iteration of this bill with the previous member—now our very good friend, the member who used to represent Niagara West-Glanbrook—he came

across the hall and said to me, “Arthur, I want to do this act. Will you co-sign it?” I thought, “Fantastic.”

The spirit of the act is, of course, spot on. The opportunities we have to encourage more small distillers in the province are extraordinarily important ones and ones that I take very, very seriously.

We went and we looked over the propositions. I helped make some suggestions, but unfortunately, I felt the act was going too far. I wasn’t in a position to co-sign it at the time, but I am delighted the member brought it back, from Leeds—

Mrs. Cristina Martins: Grenville.

Mr. Arthur Potts: —Grenville, thank you very much—brought the bill back so we can have a discussion about the incredible opportunities we see in this bill.

I also had the opportunity, with the member from Caledon when she brought forward her bill on cider, to co-sign that bill, and the member for Niagara. We actually had all three parties’ support on that bill, which we called the Growing Ontario’s Craft Cider Industry Act. I asked her at the time, “Can’t we amend this bill to put spirits into it, in the same spirit and vein, that we would have craft ciders and craft spirits all at a level playing field with craft beer?” That was the inspiration at the time and what we went forward with. That would be giving a sort of graduated tax scheme, which we see in the Free My Rye Act, it would go in that direction.

But, in long discussions that we’ve had with the cider industry, with the ministry, with the Minister of Agriculture, who spoke earlier, with the Minister of Finance, we recognize that to bring them in on the level playing field of a beer would be difficult—beer being in a pre-NAFTA situation, this being in a post-NAFTA situation where we have the opportunity to do for them what we have done with Niagara VQA wines. That’s the approach we’ve taken: to make it more consistent with how we have grown Ontario’s wineries. It’s all going to happen.

It’s of interest to me as a member. I mentioned this in my member’s statement, that 38 years ago, I was engaged with the Campaign for Real Ale Canada. I’d come back from England, where I’d spent six months of my educated youth and where I got to enjoy British beers—an extraordinary variety of different tastes in beers, from bitters to these heavy ales and stouts and porters. When I came back to Canada, I couldn’t drink Ontario beer. No disrespect, Molson Canadian, but it just didn’t have the taste.

So I got involved with the group, and 38 years ago, we changed the rules on craft breweries; see where they are now. The irony for me is to be able to be in this House and, two years ago, to go to the Minister of Finance, to go to the Minister of Agriculture as his PA and say that we need to do the same thing now, as a member of the House, that we did as outsiders 38-some years ago. What we’ve seen is that craft distillers have gone from when I started this thing, being one or two, to now being over 20—

Interjection: Twenty-two.

Mr. Arthur Potts: —twenty-two.

I want to give a shout-out to Charles Benoit. There’s been some confusion about his role, but this guy was a true pioneer in the craft distillery business. I went to see him in the Junction, and he told me the story about getting his first still across the border. When he showed up in his big truck with the still, he got stopped, because “You can’t bring that into Canada. We don’t allow people to make gin and scotch and rye. You just can’t bring this in here.” He was stuck there for 24 hours as they worked it out with the embassies.

We are making great products, products like Dillon’s, which is helping the agricultural sector by taking bad batches of wine and turning it into excellent spirits, and products like Loon vodka—four times distilled, and the last distillation is through milk, making it velvety smooth.

These are great products. As much as this bill would help, we’ve gone far enough—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Sam Oosterhoff: It’s an honour to be able to stand, as always, in the Legislature to speak to Bill 50, the Free My Rye Act (Liquor Statute Law Amendment), brought forward by the honourable member for Leeds-Grenville.

It’s an honour to be able to stand and approach this. The prior member for Niagara West-Glanbrook, Tim Hudak, did a lot of great work when it came to not only distilleries, but also when it came to wineries and promoting that industry and the valuable contributions they’ve made here in the province of Ontario—and also craft breweries, which I’m sure was also inspired partially by a visit to the UK where, I’ll agree, they do have incredible craft breweries and beers.

In my riding of Niagara West-Glanbrook, there is a craft distillery that was built up by a fellow by the name of Geoff Dillon. Dillon’s distillery is an excellent, excellent distillery that produces some of the finest spirits in Ontario.

I think, as we had a very spirited discussion this afternoon, it’s worth noting that the growth we’ve seen over the past six years in the craft distillery industry is not because of the actions of this government, as the Minister of Agriculture seems to say, but, I would argue, in spite of the actions of this government for the past six years.

The reality is that the Free My Rye Act that was put forward has very practical, common sense solutions to some of the issues that are impacting distilleries.

I do want to commend the government for some of the action that they’ve taken toward fixing some of these gaps in the service industry and also reducing some of the red tape, but the reality is that Ontario’s made such a bad mess of its liquor policy that we’re going to start subsidizing our craft distillers simply to keep them from collapsing under the weight of all the taxes they’re under. That’s what the government opposite has been doing since they took power.

I'm very pleased that the member for Leeds-Grenville is championing this cause. Tim Hudak often spoke about the importance of craft distillers, wineries and craft brewers in our riding.

I want to especially touch base and talk about the importance of cutting out the middleman by allowing craft distillers to sell spirits directly to bars, restaurants and consumers. I toured Dillon's distillery in December of last year, and this was something they mentioned as a huge priority: that we need to ensure that people can access these spirits and that we can bring them directly to the consumer, cut out the middleman and allow more opportunity for growth in the province and in this particular industry.

I want to commend the member for Leeds-Grenville for all the fine work he's done on this issue. I want to thank all the members for such a spirited debate and I look forward to supporting this bill when it comes to a vote later this afternoon.

1530

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I return to the member from Leeds-Grenville to wrap up.

Mr. Steve Clark: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to close second reading debate on Bill 50 today. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank my three caucus colleagues, the member for Nepean-Carleton, the member for Prince Edward-Hastings and the exceptional member from Niagara-West Glanbrook, for speaking in favour of my motion. I appreciate your support.

I'd also like to acknowledge the other members who will not be supporting my bill, but I appreciate the member for Windsor-Tecumseh, the member for Davenport, the member for Nickel Belt, the member for Beaches-East York and the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs for their comments. I respect your comments; I don't necessarily agree with them in all cases. Some of them I do agree with.

My message today, some could say, is that for me, as the proposer of Bill 50, it was a bit of a dispiriting day, because I think I know that the government and the third party are going to be killing this bill today. But I would say to the government that I still think there's an opportunity. There's an opportunity to provide some certainty to the industry in really putting an emphasis on being able to access the market.

As I said earlier, Free My Rye put in legislation the opportunity to grow this industry and to demand that the LCBO grow this industry. It would also demand by legislation, not by promise, that direct access to markets was available, and it would simplify that craft distillers in this province be able to provide a sample by the glass as opposed to constructing a restaurant or a bar.

I guess my message today, even though the bill will be defeated by the government majority and the New Democrats, is that I'm still committed to the OCDA. I'm still committed to help grow this industry, and I still want to be a voice for reforming our system.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. We will vote on the item at the end of private members' public business.

Orders of the day. I recognize the member from Beaches-East York.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Point of order: I beg your indulgence. We have two very special guests in the House today—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member needs to know that there is no time for this kind of point of order. It's not a point of order. It's orders of the day.

ENHANCING SHAREHOLDER RIGHTS

ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 VISANT À ACCROÎTRE LES DROITS DES ACTIONNAIRES

Mr. Takhar moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 101, An Act to amend the Business Corporations Act with respect to meetings of shareholders, the election of directors and the adoption of an executive compensation policy / Projet de loi 101, Loi modifiant la Loi sur les sociétés par actions en ce qui concerne les assemblées des actionnaires, l'élection des administrateurs et l'adoption d'une politique de rétribution des hauts responsables.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Pursuant to standing order 98, Mr. Takhar has 12 minutes for his presentation.

Mr. Harinder S. Takhar: Investors risk their hard-earned money whenever they purchase shares in a public or private corporation. Owning these shares makes shareholders the real owners of these companies and their share ownership in these companies extends to them a key right, which is to elect directors of the corporations.

However, currently the provisions of the Ontario Business Corporations Act are either unclear or are being misused in regard to the nomination process and election of directors. Due to this, the shareholders are not truly able to express their wishes when electing directors. This compromises the very fundamental right to provide input in electing directors.

The needs of business constantly change with the passing of time. As legislators, it is important for us to meet the contemporary challenges facing us. This bill will address many concerns held by shareholders by modernizing the Business Corporations Act. It's not just me saying it. I want to quote from the editorial of the July 16, 2015, edition of the *Globe and Mail* and see what they say. The quote is, "When we think of elections where voters have no choice and the winners are predetermined, we think of repressive dictatorships and not modern democratic Canada."

"Yet directors of Canadian companies come to office after 'elections' that take place under rules designed to fix the results. Shareholders are given the choice to either vote in favour of candidates put forward by the

company—a roster that exactly matches the number of available seats—or to ‘withhold’ their votes. There is no way to vote against a director. At the extreme, it means a director can be elected if only one shareholder—say, the director himself—votes in favour, even if everyone else withholds their votes. So much for shareholder democracy.

“This voting process is not the product of some nefarious corporate manipulation. It is the system laid out in Canada’s federal and provincial business statutes. They are in sore need of a major overhaul.”

This editorial is further urging regulators to consider additional changes that will allow large shareholders to propose nominees whose names would be added to the proxy ballot, and by legislating majority voting.

Based on this editorial and also on our research, there are two issues. One is how the directors get nominated, and the second issue is, how do they get elected?

The current nomination process works something like this: The directors of the corporation or the governance committees or the nomination committees of the board put the names forward. It is very rare that you will find shareholders represented on those committees.

Then the question becomes, if the shareholders are not represented on those committees, maybe they can nominate directors at the shareholders’ meeting. But this is how the shareholders’ meetings work: Normally, the chair of the meeting is the chair of the board of directors of the corporation, and those are the very people who actually recommended the list to start with. What that does is, if somebody wants to put a name forward or they’re trying to put a name forward, they wouldn’t be able to do it; they are overruled one way or the other. The amendment that we are proposing to section 99(4.2) will allow the shareholders to choose a chair in extraordinary situations.

How the voting system works: What happens is when the shareholders’ meeting is called, in the shareholders’ meeting, the shareholders are given the choice either to vote for a director or to withhold the votes. Withholding votes doesn’t mean that these are votes against a director. This means that if I am being nominated, I can vote for myself, everybody else can vote against me, and I will still get elected as a director of the corporation. This is how the current system really works. This is not a majority voting system. The majority voting system is what is being recommended by different lobby groups, as well.

The amendments that we are proposing in sections 119(4.2) and (4.5) will enact a majority voting system. Furthermore, the amendments proposed in section 119(4.3) further enhance these rights by instituting a separate vote. Not all of the directors should be voted on at the same time; each director could be voted on separately.

I just want to give an example. If everybody in the House, all of us, tell our voters, “The choice that you have is either vote for us, or you can withhold the votes, but withholding the votes doesn’t count,” that says it all.

We would be here forever unless we decided to leave this House and go somewhere else. This is how the Business Corporations Act works right now.

Shareholders, in fact, are the real owners of a corporation. They make the actual investment in this corporation. Denying them the right to nominate directors and elect directors actually is against democratic principles.

If more votes are withheld than votes in favour of the director, what happens is sometimes the corporation asks them to resign. But then that resignation is, again, considered by the directors, who are elected. So they again elect them, even though the shareholders don’t want them and have withheld the votes. The system, in a way, is stacked in favour of the people who are being nominated by the management or the directors.

The real question then becomes, what recourse is offered to a shareholder under the current legislation? The only recourse that the shareholders have is to call a special meeting of the shareholders. Under the current legislation, you need 5% of the shareholders to get together to call a special meeting of the shareholders. In a public company where the shareholders are widely scattered, to get a 5% threshold is almost impossible to achieve.

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Therefore, we are recommending that the 5% threshold be reduced to a 3% threshold. This is the number that is being recommended by the Canadian Coalition for Good Governance, which has lobbied for voting reform, arguing that Canada and the United States are outliers in a world where most major countries have allowed shareholders to vote against directors.

The other issue is, these days shares are bought online or are bought through agents, so sometimes these shares are not registered. The current legislation says that if you want to call a special meeting of the shareholders, your shares should be registered by the company. So even though you are the beneficial owner, you paid the money, you wouldn’t be able to call the meeting of the shareholders. I think that part also needs to change to keep up with the times.

Section 110(3.1) and section 112(1) are essential to expanding shareholder rights through the use and solicitation of proxies as well. Section 119(4.6) will take into account current shareholder practices.

The other issue is the solicitation of proxies. Proxies are solicited by different people. The only opportunity for proxies is either to vote for the directors that are being nominated or to withhold the vote. The proposals that are being made in this legislation under sections 110(3.1) and 112(1) are expanding the shareholders’ rights in clearly indicating whether they are voting for or against, rather than withholding their vote.

The other issue that has taken a lot of attention these days, including in this House, is how the CEOs are being paid in the corporation, including in this House. The issue there is that, even if the corporation is not doing well, the directors recommend huge salaries for the CEOs. The issue here is that the shareholders should

have some stake in how the CEOs get paid. We are saying that if the compensation policies are recommended by the shareholders, then any compensation to the CEOs or to the director should be in line with the compensation policy approved by the shareholders, because they are the owners of the company; it's not the directors who are the owners of the company. So they should have some say, and section 137(2) deals with that issue.

In conclusion, the proposed legislation actually enhances shareholder rights in significant processes such as the nomination process, the election of directors, executive compensation, as well as crafting a more transparent system for proxies to be able to express the wishes of the shareholders. This act creates a practical mechanism for shareholders to carry an effective voice in the election of directors, as well as for strengthening shareholder democracy and modernizing Ontario's place in the global marketplace.

The other thing I want to say is that this issue has also been recognized at the federal government level as well. They have introduced Bill C-25, currently before the Parliament. The amendments in this bill that I am introducing actually align well with both the spirit and language of Bill C-25 as well.

I look forward to any and all constructive suggestions from my colleagues to make this bill more effective and ensure that companies are well managed and accountable to their shareholders. At the end of the day, it is the shareholders who are taking the risk and it is the shareholders who are making the investment, so they should have the right to actually nominate directors, elect directors, and should have some say in the compensation and payment to the CEOs and directors of the company as well.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Jim McDonell: I'm pleased to rise today to respond to Bill 101, Enhancing Shareholder Rights Act.

I was able to obtain a study that was completed for the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services almost two years ago. It highlighted the need for updating and keeping Ontario's business laws current as a critical point to the province's competitiveness and to positioning it as a jurisdiction of choice for business.

Ontario is facing both opportunities and challenges as this economy shifts in various ways, including further globalization and rapid advancements in technology. This report also stated that a comprehensive review and the corresponding legislation to ensure that Ontario is competitive are long overdue.

We in the official opposition are questioning why the government has not moved on this recommendation, and why the best we are seeing is an attempt by one of its members to address the issue without the power and the strength of a government bill.

Bill 101 proposes certain progressive amendments that are in need of revision, such as important diversity reporting, voting for individual directors, requiring major-

ity director elections instead of plurality and increasing flexibility for the board to fill vacancies. But it also poses potential problems for capital markets.

Once again, we see this government's inaction on the needs of our business community. We hope to see something done in the near future that brings doing business in Ontario into the 21st century.

I will take this opportunity to explain some of the key problems we have with this bill for capital markets. First, non-voting shareholders have the right to requisition a meeting, and Bill 101's proposed reduction of the threshold from 5% to 3% for shareholders to make a proposal or to requisition a meeting would increase shareholder influence on Ontario corporations.

The real problem with this is that it would only take 3% of shareholders, whether or not they had voting rights, to requisition a meeting. The requirement that they hold voting shares would be eliminated. Shareholders could gain important influence over a corporation by simply buying up a large block of non-voting shares.

Second, if a proposal is made, shareholders must appoint a chair of the meeting. Under Bill 101, if any shareholder submits a proposal to nominate a single individual for election to the board, the shareholders of the meeting must choose a person from their number to preside as chair. Under corporate law principles, the chair of the meeting is expected to possess certain qualities of professionalism, fairness and independence. Under this bill, there is no mechanism for ensuring that a shareholder-chosen chair possesses these qualities, creating the potential for hyper-partisanship by a shareholder-chosen chair, which would be very disruptive.

In addition, the scope of this provision is unclear. Do the shareholders get to choose their chair for the corporation's entire annual general meeting or just for the election? Should the scope be narrower or confined only to the portion of the meeting that deals with the election of directors?

Third, for the section on mandatory voting for shareholders present in person, the bill would impose mandatory voting requirements for the meeting. Any shareholder present in person at the meeting would be required to cast a vote in favour or against every candidate. Given that most shareholders of public corporations are represented by proxy and do not attend meetings in person, it is not clear how this could be achieved. It may also be logically challenging to enforce.

Fourth, for the dissident proxy circulars, the bill would require management to include a dissident's proxy circular with the management information circular, unless the dissident chooses to send out its own. This raises a myriad of logistical issues. Should management impose deadlines for the submission of the dissident proxy circular to ensure the mailing complies with security requirements? Should management consider and provide recommendations on the dissident circular? Is this a reasonable additional cost for corporations to incur, regardless of the merits of the circular? At a minimum, this provision should contemplate the enactment of

regulations so that some of these issues could be addressed through further ministerial action.

Next, shareholders could force the board to comply with an executive compensation policy adopted at a meeting as a result of a shareholder proposal. Setting executive compensation is an important function of any board of directors exercising their business judgement. Many relevant considerations are in play, including aligning management incentives with the best interests of the corporation, attracting and retaining talent, budgetary issues and public perception. Taking away a board's discretion with respect to fixing executive compensation should not be done lightly.

1550

Sixth, the broader implications of Bill 101 require careful consideration and study. For example, the requirement to vote for or against directors appears inconsistent with securities rules relating to the election of directors by voting in favour or abstaining. Voting by beneficial owners will require alignment with voting tabulation mechanics to ensure that a beneficial owner does not vote twice.

Speaker, while we applaud the attempt by the member opposite to take needed action in an area that his government has ignored for years, we have to get it right. Businesses are important to this province. They employ our citizens, they pay taxes and they pay property taxes. We must do something to make sure that Ontario becomes the area that is sought after by corporations around the world. We shouldn't take lightly actions that actually cause them to leave.

Speaker, it is for these reasons that we will be opposing this bill.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Jennifer K. French: Thank you to the member from Mississauga—Erindale for the opportunity to speak to Bill 101, the Enhancing Shareholder Rights Act. I'm going to read a little bit of the explanatory note, because it's very concise, as it explains, and it helped me to understand:

"The bill makes various amendments to the Business Corporations Act with respect to meetings of shareholders, the process for electing directors and the use of proxies.

"The new Part IX.1 requires certain corporations to place before the shareholders, at every annual meeting, information respecting diversity among directors and the members of senior management.

"Finally, the act is amended to provide shareholders with the opportunity to propose an executive compensation policy at a meeting of shareholders. The directors of the corporation are required to comply with the policy if it is adopted."

That's from the explanatory note.

Speaker, as we know, this is not the first time that this bill has been introduced. The member from Mississauga—Erindale first introduced and debated it in 2015, before the bill died on the order paper after—you may have

heard—the government called for prorogation this past September. So here we find ourselves. Regardless, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss this legislation here today. We'll talk about what is in the bill.

Under this legislation, shareholders will see lower requirements for submitting proposals to elect directors, appoint meeting chairs and call shareholder meetings. If passed, elected directors will have the ability to appoint directors under certain circumstances. It adds stipulations to ensure that proxies are voting in line with the desires of the shareholder. It adds the requirement that directors for prescribed corporations present shareholders, at every annual meeting, with information regarding diversity among the directors and members of senior management.

Madam Speaker, as noted in the title of the bill—Enhancing Shareholder Rights Act—the legislation will ultimately function to enhance the rights of shareholders in a number of different circumstances. For example, when nominating and electing a director, this bill gives shareholders the opportunity to be a part of the process. It notes that:

"A proposal may nominate a single individual for election as a director if the proposal is signed by one or more registered holders of shares or beneficial owners of shares that represent in the aggregate,

"(a) at least 3 per cent of the shares of the corporation; or

"(b) at least 3 per cent of the shares of a class or series of shares of the corporation that are entitled to vote at the meeting to which the proposal is to be presented."

Currently, a cut-off of 5% is required. This legislation would lower the threshold to 3%.

I also understand that in the member's previous iteration of this bill, the threshold was set to be lowered to 2%. I'm not sure what new information has been discovered in the last two years or what would inform the change, but it seems that the member feels that 3% is more appropriate or perhaps strikes a better balance. Regardless, the primary function is to lower that threshold, and so the bill will do just that.

It also goes into further detail about the process of nominating and electing a director, but I have limited time, so I'll try to cover some areas of the bill here.

The bill also deals with the appointment of directors, which I believe was a new addition from previous iterations of this bill as well. Additionally, the bill provides shareholders with the opportunity to use proxies, to allow the shareholder a means to specify how their shares will vote.

The bill also deals with executive compensation. Section 169.1 states that voting shareholders "may make a proposal to adopt" or amend or repeal "an executive compensation policy with respect to the remuneration of directors or officers of the corporation...."

This means that shareholders will be able to have their voices heard on executive compensation, perhaps if they feel the CEO is being paid too much, or the unlikely possibility that they feel he or she is being paid too little.

Again, this is a shift to provide shareholders a greater deal of input than they previously have had.

Finally, the bill also has a section pertaining to disclosure relating to the diversity of a board, noting that "The directors of a prescribed corporation shall place before the shareholders, at every annual meeting, the prescribed information respecting diversity among the directors and among the members of senior management as defined in the regulations." Perhaps this will promote greater diversity in executive boards, and will give shareholders the power to hold them accountable if this is not occurring.

Speaker, again, thank you to the member for Mississauga-Erindale for the opportunity to speak to this bill today. I always enjoy having the opportunity to learn a little bit more about process, and in this case, the process of nominating, appointing and electing directors of an executive board, so thank you for that.

Speaker, it's nice to finally have an opportunity to discuss a Liberal bill that actually does what it says it will in the title, so thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Ms. Harinder Malhi: I'm pleased to have this opportunity to speak in support of this bill, an act to amend the Business Corporations Act.

Our government is committed to growing the economy and helping to create jobs, now and into the future. In order to meet our commitments, we must support business and ensure Ontario has modern laws that facilitate an efficient market and a prosperous business climate.

The governing legislation for Ontario business corporations is Ontario's Business Corporations Act. It provides, among other things, incorporation, director and officer responsibilities, shareholder rights, offences and penalties. As with all government legislation, this act should be reviewed and updated when necessary, to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of business. That is why my colleague the member from Mississauga-Erindale is proposing this bill.

The first issue I will address is shareholders' involvement in the nomination process of the board of directors. Currently, shareholders have the choice to either vote in favour of the candidates put forward by the company or to withhold their vote, which means that they are not counted in the vote tally. The results of this are that a director can be elected to the board even if a majority of shareholders withhold their votes. Advocates of business investors have long been asking for legal changes which would allow shareholders to vote against candidates for seats on the board of directors, or otherwise making voting truly democratic.

Current best practices in Canada suggest that nominees for a board of directors should be chosen by an independent nominating committee of the board. The nominee slate, however, often tends to reflect the board's or, in some instances, the CEO's network of relationships and prospects. Even when the prospective candidates are

found through the services of an independent search firm, the parameters of the search firm's mandate, as well as the production of their list of recommendations, can be determined by the members of the nominating committee or the CEO.

Earlier last year, the Minister of Government and Consumer Services at the time announced that a government-appointed panel of legal experts had tabled a series of reform proposals to modernize Ontario's business legislation. One of these proposals was to allow shareholders to vote no in the election of directors, to make it easier for investors to reject unwanted members of the board. The committee's recommendations have been available for public comment, and now this ministry will review the issues and decide how to proceed with legislative reforms.

Shareholders should have the ability to effectively choose their boards and be entitled to vote against candidates for election to the board.

In October 2014, a discussion paper by the UN, Principles for Responsible Investment, noted that a stronger nomination process is fundamental to boards for their effectiveness. In addition to encouraging boards to engage with their shareholders in regard to the composition of the board, it's the belief that large shareholders should be allowed to propose nominees whose names would be added to the ballot, thereby eliminating a closed slate of directors suggested by the company and allowing a greater choice.

1600

Another change which was proposed in this bill is one of majority voting. As I spoke of earlier, the current practice for elections to a board of directors under the Canadian legislation is based on the plurality system rather than a majority system. Again, shareholders are allowed to vote either in favour of a nominee or to withhold their vote, which means no vote for or against. In this system, a director can technically be elected to a board with only one vote in his or her favour.

Canada has already seen how this new voting process can work. Despite the absence of legislative reform, many companies in Canada have adopted the majority voting policy on their own. The underlying idea behind an enhanced ability for shareholders to have a meaningful say in the nomination of the board of directors is a benefit to the corporation and a fundamental belief in shareholder democracy.

A slate of nominees in a non-contested election for a board of directors, where the number of nominees equals the number of openings on the board and with all the nominees having been selected by the existing board, often with input from the CEO, without equal or balanced input into composition by voting participants, is not a true shareholder democracy. Shareholders are, in fact, the owners of the company, so why shouldn't they have the option to remove members of the board who are ineffective? Only legislative reform can ensure a new voting system is preserved in law.

The third point I'd like to discuss is in regard to shareholder involvement in director and management compensation. Investors are becoming much more assertive in regard to the lack of connection between executive remuneration and company performance. The current system in Canada has been criticized for having little control over the compensation structure, with concerns raised over salaries and bonuses paid annually to executives despite falling company performance and share prices.

I support this legislation. I think that it will strengthen boards and their effectiveness and, through them, strengthen the companies that they govern. I support the changes to business laws, which will make voting truly democratic. I am pleased, therefore, to support my colleague in his attempt to amend the Business Corporations Act.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mrs. Gila Martow: I'm very pleased to rise. We are having a sort of serious discussion, I guess, for the last topic of the week. It's Bill 101, the business corporations amendment act, shareholder meetings and executive compensation, brought forward as a private member's bill by the member from Mississauga—Erindale. He's putting forward quite a few suggestions.

I'm not an expert in corporate law, and I did consult with some lawyers who are. They're very concerned about possibly unintended consequences—or perhaps it's intended consequences; it's hard to say. The member is proposing with Bill 101 some progressive amendments including diversity reporting—and I'm not sure exactly what that entails, but it sounds progressive—voting for individual directors, requiring a majority in director elections instead of a plurality and increasing flexibility for the board to fill vacancies.

We're concerned about potential problems, obviously, for capital markets and the reasoning behind why there's this proposed reduction of the threshold from 5% to 3% for shareholders who want to make a proposal or requisition a meeting. There wasn't really an explanation of why 3% is the right number or why 5% perhaps isn't the right number.

The member mentioned that, and I'm quoting, "different lobby groups recommend" it. Well, he only mentioned one lobby group, the Canadian Coalition for Good Governance. I would ask, what were all these different lobby groups who recommend it and what exactly did they recommend?

Obviously, there's too much red tape in the province of Ontario. Our hydro costs are high. There are a lot of challenges for businesses to establish in Ontario or grow in Ontario. What our party is concerned about is what is in this legislation that would promote businesses to want to locate or expand in Ontario? That really wasn't made very clear, certainly not to me.

There's a lot of technology that perhaps can be used to help with corporate meetings and things like that, and I didn't hear any specifics addressing that. There's talk

about allowing non-voting shareholders to vote, and excuse me if I sound confused, because I am confused, Madam Speaker; to me, a non-voting share means that you can't vote. To all of a sudden allow people to vote with non-voting shares didn't quite add up in my mind.

I recall when I lived in Quebec that there were builders who would have the same directors, but every two years or so they would change the corporation, and they always—just so you knew exactly which corporation you were dealing with, there was one that would always use the family of a flower. They were the rose corporation, then they were the dahlia corporation. I'm not sure if they've run out of flowers by now. But there was a lot of talk in newspapers in Montreal at that time about whether or not directors should be allowed to collapse corporations and then just be a director on a corporation that was in the exact same business.

The member opposite, the former dean of a law school, is nodding at me.

These are the concerns that I would like to hear about today. What can be done to protect the public, to grow business, not just to perhaps give shareholders more powers. Perhaps they do deserve it, but I need to hear exactly why they deserve those powers.

We heard from the member who put forward this bill—and I'm quoting—"directors recommend huge salaries" even if the company isn't doing well. We're talking constantly in the Legislature about Hydro's executive salaries, that we would expect transparency and accountability on executive salaries for people who are being paid by the taxpayers of Ontario. We would expect the government to address that before they're addressing corporations.

I want to mention that the diversity aspect of it really wasn't explained at all. I would invite the member opposite, in his closing remarks, to perhaps explain exactly what he means. I would just remind everybody—there's such a cute story in the news this week about two boys, best friends, one from the African American community in the States and one a white boy. They cut their hair the same and they said that were going to go to school and trick the teacher; she wouldn't be able to tell them apart. That's real colour-blindness. As an optometrist, we use that term a lot.

When we talk about diversity, what do we mean? Do we mean gender? Do we mean cultures? Do we mean races? It's a tough topic, I think, for all of us here, but I would like to have an explanation.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Further debate?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I'd like to thank the member for Mississauga—Erindale for bringing forward this bill. He's well versed in the ways of corporate Canada. If anyone's going to talk about how things work in the boardroom and at the shareholders' annual meeting, he's going to be the person to be able to do that.

I would say that what he's trying to do in this bill—and he may well correct me when he makes his final remarks—is address a deficit in democracy, ensuring that

there's greater shareholder ability to determine who's actually running the corporation. He's trying to address the question of diversity.

Now, a question was asked by my colleague from the opposition about what exactly that means. My recollection was that you didn't expand on that when you were making your presentation earlier, and I expect you will expand on that. He also talked about this whole question of setting executive compensation or, rather, allowing the shareholders who are taking the risks to set the compensation level.

The heart of what's before us, I think, is fairly logical. I'm interested in noting that the opposition seems to be more concerned with the bill, and I'm sure the member will address that.

But there are big pieces here that the member has taken on. Clearly, the first thing that occurs to me is looking at the framework he's brought forward and looking at Hydro One and the privatization of Hydro One; because as I understand what he's had to say, the democratic control of the shareholders is very, very limited. In fact, what we've done is taken a corporation owned by all of the people of Ontario, 13-million-plus, and we've put it into a much narrower range of hands in a situation where—and as he said, this is intriguing to me—a person could be elected to the board with even one vote, as long as they were nominated. It really means that the control of the board doesn't rest with the broad range of shareholders, it rests with the board of directors itself, which, in many ways, seems to be a self-perpetuating club. In this province, when we're looking at the interest of the province as a whole, I don't think we want a self-perpetuating club running the network that ties together the whole province's electricity system. I think that the use of the term "broadened" by the Premier when she talked about this sell-off of Hydro One should be better informed by this private member's bill, which says that, in fact, control is very narrowly held, not broadly held.

1610

The member talked about the necessity of talking about CEO salaries and actually allowing the shareholders to set the framework, the compensation policy. That's intriguing to me. A business magazine writing about the top 100 CEOs in Canada said that there's this push from two ends: from those who are interested in shareholder value—very business-oriented people—saying, "Good God, why are we paying people this much money?" and from those of us who are interested in social justice saying, "Good God, why are we paying these people this much money?"

You should be aware, Speaker, that the member is quite correct. Compensation seems to be divorced from actual performance of a corporation. I imagine that if a corporation has got a lot of money, it's easier to get a bigger salary. But it's not always true.

People should be aware that in Canada, according to Canadian Business magazine, the average salary for a CEO is \$9.5 million. That's 190 times more than the

Canadian average income. It's quite extraordinary to me. That average doesn't express really the full range.

Number one, at least a year ago, was the Onex CEO, Gerry Schwartz, \$87.9 million. Speaker, I don't think you can justify that salary. I just don't think you can. It's an unfair extraction of value from the economy for one person. Hunter Harrison, CEO of CP rail, \$49 million; John Chen, BlackBerry, \$88 million—

Hon. David Zimmer: A lot of overtime there.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: "A lot of overtime," I heard from the other side. It's extraordinary. If they were working 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, you're still talking about an amazing hourly rate.

I have to say that when you bandy about those numbers, when you talk about the \$4 million that's being paid to the head of Hydro One—an amount that I still think cannot be justified; it's totally outrageous—it seems reasonable, as the member has said, that at least the people who have their money invested in a corporation should have some say as to how much is carted off by those at the very top.

I note, as well, that we talk about disclosure of diversity. I'm sure that this will be expanded on. But I had the opportunity yesterday on an open-line radio show to debate pay equity. Intriguing to me was the fact that, in the public sector, it's roughly 50-50 in terms of men and women at the top in senior management. So there's a rough equality.

But in the private sector, only 26% of senior management is female. The rest are male. So it actually takes a government to step in, set the guidelines and develop that fairness, that equity. My hope is that this amendment would have some impact in the private sector because, clearly, having women at 26% of the senior decision-makers is completely unfair.

Speaker, my time is so short. If I had an opportunity in committee, I would add disclosure of climate risk for stakeholders, so that they would know that the potential for collapse of stocks or bonds because of the fossil fuel bubble that we have in this world today—

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Thank you. Further debate?

Mr. Bob Delaney: First of all, I truly do commend my colleague from Mississauga-Erindale for bringing forth a bill that speaks to some of the real needs of investors today. If I were to summarize it in a sentence, it would be that what we need on publicly traded corporations are boards of directors, not boards of directed.

What the member has pointed out in his bill is the many ways in which a publicly traded corporation is, in fact, managed only nominally by what amounts to a board of directed, a board of people who are nominated by a committee within the corporation who are beholden to the corporation and who really have relatively little incentive to rock the boat.

What he has proposed as reforms to Ontario securities legislation are some proposals that have truly lasting and significant value. For those of us who invest in our future by buying stocks, either in our margin accounts or in our

self-directed RRSPs or whatever, this allows those investments that we make to take a solid step toward more transparency, more fairness and more accountability.

I'd like to comment just briefly on some of the proposals that the member makes. He suggests that shareholders can nominate a single individual for election as a director if the proposal is signed by one or more registered shareholders amounting to at least 3% of the shares of a corporation. You think: 3%. Put that into some perspective. If, for example, that corporation were one of the larger publicly traded corporations in Canada—for example, CN rail—that's actually a very high threshold. At the moment, the threshold is 5%, which is nearly impossible.

Let me give you an idea, if we were talking about—I'm just going to use two examples. If it were CN rail, which has a number of shares outstanding of 762 million, 3% of those would represent 22.8 million shares—roughly \$2.2 billion in value. This is a significant undertaking. If you get to that point where shareholders say, "We want one of ours on that board," that requires a fair amount of effort to organize. If that publicly traded corporation were, for example, Hydro One, with 595 million shares outstanding, 3% of that would be nearly 18 million shares, representing some \$420 million in value.

This is a reasonable threshold. What it proposes is a lowering from 5% to 3% to make the idea of bringing on an independent director much more possible.

The member also talks about the notion of something that some of us see when we get the information circulars prior to an annual meeting, where it has a list of the various people proposed to be members of the board. Your options are either to vote for them or to withhold your vote. As he accurately points out, you can't vote against them. It's not as if a member proposed for election to the board could say that 62% of the shareholders of record as of such-and-such a date voted for you and 38% voted against you, or the reverse. What he points out, accurately, is that if 62% of the shareholders of record simply withhold their vote, you're still elected by that 38% of shares.

That's not the intent of what people expect when they elect shareholders, but it is certainly the outcome. So what he asks is something that's completely reasonable, which is to say, "Why can't we vote against a proposed director?" I'd be perfectly happy with that. It would also require the nominating committees within publicly traded corporations to put a lot more thought into it.

He also talks about the notion of more transparency around executive compensation. Once again, there's nothing preventing a publicly traded corporation's management from setting a fairly—on the surface—ambitious compensation scheme that says, "Here's your base salary." You look at that and you think, "Okay, that's not way out of line." "And here is a whole series of incentives that lead you to a much higher number," in which case you say, "What exactly do you have to do that

creates value for me as a shareholder in order to justify your very large salary with incentives and bonuses?" If the answer is, "Not very much," then I think shareholders really need to have a say in that, to say, "If what you intend to do is to richly reward the members of our management team, then you've got to richly reward me and increase my value as a shareholder, and if you do that, there has to be some serious stretch in those bonuses and compensations."

All in all, Speaker, in looking at the proposals made by the member, who has introduced them before, they show the member's wide range of business experience in the private sector. They show some of his experience in serving on boards. They make some concrete, sensible proposals that should be discussed in committee and that should be given the light of day.

1620

I'm looking forward to supporting this particular private member's bill because I think it's an important one. I think it's one that is going to enhance shareholder value. I think it's one that is going to bring transparency and accountability in greater measure to our publicly traded corporations. All in all, I think it's good for shareholders, good for the market and good for the country, so I'm looking forward to seeing this bill carry today.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I will return to the member from Mississauga—Erindale for the wrap-up.

Mr. Harinder S. Takhar: I want to thank all of the speakers who had a chance to speak on this bill. I want to thank the member from Oshawa and the member from Streetsville for explaining this bill better than even I did, and I also want to thank the members from Danforth and Springdale for their input as well, and their good suggestions.

The member from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry and member from Thornhill: I am not sure where they were coming from. Let me just address some of their issues. The issue of diversity: For me, it's a gender issue and it's a cultural issue. This week in the *Globe and Mail*, they talked about four major companies who have not been able to put a woman member on the board in spite of a very clear instruction from the TSX for a very, very long time.

It is important that we have diversity on boards. It is important that we have diversity in the senior management as well. It's only because of that that corporations can have well-governed governance and well-governed management, as well.

Actually, I'm very surprised that they are saying that non-voting shareholders can vote. "Non-voting shareholders" means non-voting shareholders. I'm not sure where it says, even in my legislation, any reference to non-voting shareholders. For them to even stand up and say that I am saying non-voting shareholders will be able to vote—this statement shouldn't even have been made in this House, which tells me they didn't even read the bill properly. Or they didn't read the bill; they just got the notes and then they started speaking about it.

But I want to thank them for their remarks. I think the threshold issue is an important issue, because, as my colleague from Streetsville pointed out, even 3% in large public companies is very hard to get, let alone 5%. If we want the shareholders to have some input, then it's important to ask them to lower the threshold. Shareholders are the ones who have taken the risk. They are the ones who are making the investment; it's not the directors. We want to give them more rights to move the corporation's governance model forward.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The time provided for private members' public business has expired.

SAFE TEXTING ZONES ACT, 2017
LOI DE 2017 SUR L'AMÉNAGEMENT
DE HALTES TEXTO SÉCURITAIRES

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): We will deal first with ballot item number 37, standing in the name of Mr. Fedeli.

Mr. Fedeli has moved second reading of Bill 19, An Act governing the designation and use of texting zones.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry? I hear "carried."

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to turn to the member from Nipissing. To which committee?

Mr. Victor Fedeli: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, everybody. To the Standing Committee on Finance.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Standing Committee on Finance. Agreed? Agreed. Congratulations.

FREE MY RYE ACT (LIQUOR STATUTE
LAW AMENDMENT), 2017
LOI DE 2017 SUR LA VENTE LIBRE
DE WHISKY (MODIFIANT DES LOIS
EN CE QUI CONCERNE
LES BOISSONS ALCOOLIQUES)

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Clark has moved second reading of Bill 50, An Act to amend the Liquor Control Act and the Liquor Licence Act with respect to the sale of spirits.

Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?
All those in favour of the motion, please say "aye."

All those opposed to the motion, please say "nay."
In my opinion, the nays have it.

Mr. Steve Clark: On division.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): On division.
I declare the motion lost on division.

Second reading negative.

ENHANCING SHAREHOLDER RIGHTS
ACT, 2017

LOI DE 2017 VISANT À ACCROÎTRE
LES DROITS DES ACTIONNAIRES

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): Mr. Takhar has moved second reading of Bill 101, An Act to amend the Business Corporations Act with respect to meetings of shareholders, the election of directors and the adoption of an executive compensation policy.

Is it the pleasure of the House the motion carry? I hear "carried."

All those in favour, please say "aye."

All those opposed, say "no."

I believe the ayes carry it.

Interjection: On division.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): On division?
Okay.

Second reading agreed to.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): I'm going to turn to the member to identify which committee.

Mr. Harinder S. Takhar: I would like to move it to the finance and economic affairs committee, please.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The member has asked that the bill go to the finance and economic committee. Is it agreed? Agreed.

Orders of the day? I recognize the Minister of Research, Innovation and Science.

Hon. Reza Moridi: Madam Speaker, I move adjournment of the House.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): The minister has moved a motion to adjourn the House. Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?

All those in favour? All those opposed? In my opinion, the ayes have it.

Mr. Steve Clark: On division.

The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Soo Wong): On division—okay. On division.

We will adjourn the House until March 20, 2017, at 10:30. I wish everybody a safe March break.

The House adjourned at 1626.

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

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Clerk / Greffier: Todd Decker

Deputy Clerk / Sous-greffier: Trevor Day

Clerks-at-the-Table / Greffiers parlementaires: Tonia Grannum, William Short

Sergeant-at-Arms / Sergente d'armes: Jacquelyn Gordon

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Albanese, Hon. / L'hon. Laura (LIB)	York South–Weston / York-Sud–Weston	Minister of Citizenship and Immigration / Ministre des Affaires civiques et de l'Immigration
Anderson, Granville (LIB)	Durham	
Armstrong, Teresa J. (NDP)	London–Fanshawe	
Arnott, Ted (PC)	Wellington–Halton Hills	First Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Premier vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée
Bailey, Robert (PC)	Sarnia–Lambton	
Baker, Yvan (LIB)	Etobicoke Centre / Etobicoke-Centre	
Ballard, Hon. / L'hon. Chris (LIB)	Newmarket–Aurora	Minister of Housing / Ministre du Logement Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy / Ministre responsable de la Stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté
Barrett, Toby (PC)	Haldimand–Norfolk	
Berardinetti, Lorenzo (LIB)	Scarborough Southwest / Scarborough-Sud-Ouest	
Bisson, Gilles (NDP)	Timmins–James Bay / Timmins–Baie James	
Bradley, James J. (LIB)	St. Catharines	Deputy Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint du gouvernement
Brown, Patrick (PC)	Simcoe North / Simcoe-Nord	Leader, Official Opposition / Chef de l'opposition officielle Leader, Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti progressiste-conservateur de l'Ontario
Campbell, Sarah (NDP)	Kenora–Rainy River	
Chan, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Markham–Unionville	Minister of International Trade / Ministre du Commerce International
Chiarelli, Hon. / L'hon. Bob (LIB)	Ottawa West–Nepean / Ottawa-Ouest–Nepean	Minister of Infrastructure / Ministre de l'Infrastructure
Cho, Raymond Sung Joon (PC)	Scarborough–Rouge River	
Clark, Steve (PC)	Leeds–Grenville	Deputy Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire adjoint de l'opposition officielle Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjoint de l'opposition officielle
Coe, Lorne (PC)	Whitby–Oshawa	
Colle, Mike (LIB)	Eglinton–Lawrence	
Coteau, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Don Valley East / Don Valley-Est	Minister of Children and Youth Services / Ministre des Services à l'enfance et à la jeunesse Minister Responsible for Anti-Racism / Ministre délégué à l'Action contre le racisme
Crack, Grant (LIB)	Glengarry–Prescott–Russell	
Damerla, Hon. / L'hon. Dipika (LIB)	Mississauga East–Cooksville / Mississauga-Est–Cooksville	Minister of Seniors Affairs / Ministre des Affaires des personnes âgées
Del Duca, Hon. / L'hon. Steven (LIB)	Vaughan	Minister of Transportation / Ministre des Transports
Delaney, Bob (LIB)	Mississauga–Streetsville	
Des Rosiers, Nathalie (LIB)	Ottawa–Vanier	
Dhillon, Vic (LIB)	Brampton West / Brampton-Ouest	
Dickson, Joe (LIB)	Ajax–Pickering	
DiNovo, Cheri (NDP)	Parkdale–High Park	
Dong, Han (LIB)	Trinity–Spadina	
Duguid, Hon. / L'hon. Brad (LIB)	Scarborough Centre / Scarborough-Centre	Minister of Economic Development and Growth / Ministre du Développement économique et de la Croissance
Fedeli, Victor (PC)	Nipissing	
Fife, Catherine (NDP)	Kitchener–Waterloo	
Flynn, Hon. / L'hon. Kevin Daniel (LIB)	Oakville	Minister of Labour / Ministre du Travail
Forster, Cindy (NDP)	Welland	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Fraser, John (LIB)	Ottawa South / Ottawa-Sud	
French, Jennifer K. (NDP)	Oshawa	
Gates, Wayne (NDP)	Niagara Falls	
Gélinas, France (NDP)	Nickel Belt	
Gravelle, Hon. / L'hon. Michael (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Superior North / Thunder Bay–Superior-Nord	Minister of Northern Development and Mines / Ministre du Développement du Nord et des Mines
Gretzky, Lisa (NDP)	Windsor West / Windsor-Ouest	
Hardeman, Ernie (PC)	Oxford	
Harris, Michael (PC)	Kitchener–Conestoga	
Hatfield, Percy (NDP)	Windsor–Tecumseh	
Hillier, Randy (PC)	Lanark–Frontenac–Lennox and Addington	
Hoggarth, Ann (LIB)	Barrie	
Horwath, Andrea (NDP)	Hamilton Centre / Hamilton-Centre	Leader, Recognized Party / Chef de parti reconnu
Hoskins, Hon. / L'hon. Eric (LIB)	St. Paul's	Leader, New Democratic Party of Ontario / Chef du Nouveau parti démocratique de l'Ontario
Hunter, Hon. / L'hon. Mitzie (LIB)	Scarborough–Guildwood	Minister of Health and Long-Term Care / Ministre de la Santé et des Soins de longue durée
Jaczek, Hon. / L'hon. Helena (LIB)	Oak Ridges–Markham	Minister of Education / Ministre de l'Éducation
Jones, Sylvia (PC)	Dufferin–Caledon	Minister of Community and Social Services / Ministre des Services sociaux et communautaires
Kiwala, Sophie (LIB)	Kingston and the Islands / Kingston et les Îles	Deputy Leader, Official Opposition / Chef adjointe de l'opposition officielle
Kwinter, Monte (LIB)	York Centre / York-Centre	
Lalonde, Hon. / L'hon. Marie-France (LIB)	Ottawa–Orléans	Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services / Ministre de la Sécurité communautaire et des Services correctionnels
Leal, Hon. / L'hon. Jeff (LIB)	Peterborough	Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs / Ministre déléguée aux Affaires francophones
Levac, Hon. / L'hon. Dave (LIB)	Brant	Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs / Ministre de l'Agriculture, de l'Alimentation et des Affaires rurales
MacCharles, Hon. / L'hon. Tracy (LIB)	Pickering–Scarborough East / Pickering–Scarborough-Est	Minister Responsible for Small Business / Ministre responsable des Petites Entreprises
MacLaren, Jack (PC)	Carleton–Mississippi Mills	Speaker / Président de l'Assemblée législative
MacLeod, Lisa (PC)	Nepean–Carleton	Minister of Government and Consumer Services / Ministre des Services gouvernementaux et des Services aux consommateurs
Malhi, Harinder (LIB)	Brampton–Springdale	Minister Responsible for Accessibility / Ministre responsable de l'Accessibilité
Mangat, Amrit (LIB)	Mississauga–Brampton South / Mississauga–Brampton-Sud	
Mantha, Michael (NDP)	Algoma–Manitoulin	
Martins, Cristina (LIB)	Davenport	
Martow, Gila (PC)	Thornhill	
Matthews, Hon. / L'hon. Deborah (LIB)	London North Centre / London-Centre-Nord	Chair of Cabinet / Présidente du Conseil des ministres
Mauro, Hon. / L'hon. Bill (LIB)	Thunder Bay–Atikokan	Deputy Premier / Vice-première ministre
McDonell, Jim (PC)	Stormont–Dundas–South Glengarry	Minister of Advanced Education and Skills Development / Ministre de l'Enseignement supérieur et de la Formation professionnelle
McGarry, Hon. / L'hon. Kathryn (LIB)	Cambridge	Minister Responsible for Digital Government / Ministre responsable de l'Action pour un gouvernement numérique
McMahon, Hon. / L'hon. Eleanor (LIB)	Burlington	Minister of Municipal Affairs / Ministre des Affaires municipales
McMeekin, Ted (LIB)	Ancaster–Dundas–Flamborough–Westdale	Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry / Ministre des Richesses naturelles et des Forêts
McNaughton, Monte (PC)	Lambton–Kent–Middlesex	Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport / Ministre du Tourisme, de la Culture et du Sport
Milczyn, Peter Z. (LIB)	Etobicoke–Lakeshore	

Member and Party / Député(e) et parti	Constituency / Circonscription	Other responsibilities / Autres responsabilités
Miller, Norm (PC) Miller, Paul (NDP)	Parry Sound–Muskoka Hamilton East–Stoney Creek / Hamilton-Est–Stoney Creek	Third Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Troisième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Moridi, Hon. / L'hon. Reza (LIB)	Richmond Hill	Minister of Research, Innovation and Science / Ministre de la Recherche, de l'Innovation et des Sciences
Munro, Julia (PC) Murray, Hon. / L'hon. Glen R. (LIB)	York–Simcoe Toronto Centre / Toronto-Centre	Minister of the Environment and Climate Change / Ministre de l'Environnement et de l'Action en matière de changement climatique
Naidoo-Harris, Hon. / L'hon. Indira (LIB)	Halton	Minister of the Status of Women / Ministre de la condition féminine
Naqvi, Hon. / L'hon. Yasir (LIB)	Ottawa Centre / Ottawa-Centre	Minister Responsible for Early Years and Child Care / Ministre responsable de la Petite enfance et de la Garde d'enfants
Natyshak, Taras (NDP) Nicholls, Rick (PC)	Essex Chatham-Kent–Essex	Attorney General / Procureur général Government House Leader / Leader parlementaire du gouvernement
Oosterhoff, Sam (PC)	Niagara West–Glanbrook / Niagara-Ouest–Glanbrook	Second Deputy Chair of the Committee of the Whole House / Deuxième vice-président du comité plénier de l'Assemblée législative
Pettapiece, Randy (PC) Potts, Arthur (LIB) Qaadri, Shafiq (LIB) Rinaldi, Lou (LIB) Sandals, Hon. / L'hon. Liz (LIB)	Perth–Wellington Beaches–East York Etobicoke North / Etobicoke-Nord Northumberland–Quinte West Guelph	President of the Treasury Board / Présidente du Conseil du Trésor
Sattler, Peggy (NDP) Scott, Laurie (PC) Sergio, Mario (LIB) Singh, Jagmeet (NDP) Smith, Todd (PC) Sousa, Hon. / L'hon. Charles (LIB)	London West / London-Ouest Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock York West / York-Ouest Bramalea–Gore–Malton Prince Edward–Hastings	Deputy Leader, Recognized Party / Chef adjoint de parti reconnu
Tabuns, Peter (NDP) Takhar, Harinder S. (LIB) Taylor, Monique (NDP) Thibeault, Hon. / L'hon. Glenn (LIB)	Mississauga South / Mississauga-Sud Toronto–Danforth Mississauga–Erindale Hamilton Mountain Sudbury	Minister of Finance / Ministre des Finances
Thompson, Lisa M. (PC) Vanthof, John (NDP) Vernile, Daiene (LIB) Walker, Bill (PC) Wilson, Jim (PC)	Huron–Bruce Timiskaming–Cochrane Kitchener Centre / Kitchener-Centre Bruce–Grey–Owen Sound Simcoe–Grey	Minister of Energy / Ministre de l'Énergie
Wong, Soo (LIB) Wynne, Hon. / L'hon. Kathleen O. (LIB)	Scarborough–Agincourt Don Valley West / Don Valley-Ouest	Opposition House Leader / Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle Deputy Speaker / Vice-présidente Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs / Ministre des Affaires intergouvernementales Premier / Première ministre Leader, Liberal Party of Ontario / Chef du Parti libéral de l'Ontario
Yakabuski, John (PC) Yurek, Jeff (PC) Zimmer, Hon. / L'hon. David (LIB)	Renfrew–Nipissing–Pembroke Elgin–Middlesex–London Willowdale	Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation / Ministre des Relations avec les Autochtones et de la Réconciliation
Vacant	Sault Ste. Marie	

**STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
COMITÉS PERMANENTS DE L'ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE**

Standing Committee on Estimates / Comité permanent des budgets des dépenses

Chair / Présidente: Cheri DiNovo
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Michael Mantha
Bob Delaney, Cheri DiNovo
Joe Dickson, Michael Harris
Sophie Kiwala, Michael Mantha
Peter Z. Milczyn, Arthur Potts
Todd Smith
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs / Comité permanent des finances et des affaires économiques

Chair / Président: Peter Z. Milczyn
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Ann Hoggarth
Yvan Baker, Toby Barrett
Han Dong, Victor Fedeli
Catherine Fife, Ann Hoggarth
Harinder Malhi, Cristina Martins
Peter Z. Milczyn
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Eric Rennie

Standing Committee on General Government / Comité permanent des affaires gouvernementales

Chair / Président: Grant Crack
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Granville Anderson
Granville Anderson, Yvan Baker
Mike Colle, Grant Crack
Nathalie Des Rosiers, Lisa Gretzky
Ann Hoggarth, Julia Munro
Lisa M. Thompson
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przezdziecki

Standing Committee on Government Agencies / Comité permanent des organismes gouvernementaux

Chair / Présidente: Cristina Martins
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Daiene Vernile
Granville Anderson, James J. Bradley
Wayne Gates, Amrit Mangat
Cristina Martins, Sam Oosterhoff
Randy Pettapiece, Shafiq Qaadri
Daiene Vernile
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Sylwia Przezdziecki

Standing Committee on Justice Policy / Comité permanent de la justice

Chair / Président: Shafiq Qaadri
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lorenzo Berardinetti
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Mike Colle
Bob Delaney, Nathalie Des Rosiers
Michael Mantha, Jim McDonell
Shafiq Qaadri, Daiene Vernile
Bill Walker
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Standing Committee on the Legislative Assembly / Comité permanent de l'Assemblée législative

Chair / Président: Monte McNaughton
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Laurie Scott
Robert Bailey, James J. Bradley
Joe Dickson, Sophie Kiwala
Harinder Malhi, Michael Mantha
Monte McNaughton, Laurie Scott
Soo Wong
Committee Clerk / Greffier: William Short

Standing Committee on Public Accounts / Comité permanent des comptes publics

Chair / Président: Ernie Hardeman
Vice-Chair / Vice-présidente: Lisa MacLeod
Vic Dhillon, Han Dong
John Fraser, Ernie Hardeman
Percy Hatfield, Randy Hillier
Monte Kwinter, Lisa MacLeod
Arthur Potts
Committee Clerk / Greffière: Valerie Quioc Lim

Standing Committee on Regulations and Private Bills / Comité permanent des règlements et des projets de loi d'intérêt privé

Chair / Président: Ted McMeekin
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Lou Rinaldi
Lorenzo Berardinetti, Grant Crack
Jennifer K. French, Jack McLaren
Ted McMeekin, Lou Rinaldi
Mario Sergio, Soo Wong
Jeff Yurek
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Christopher Tyrell

Standing Committee on Social Policy / Comité permanent de la politique sociale

Chair / Président: Peter Tabuns
Vice-Chair / Vice-président: Jagmeet Singh
Lorne Coe, Vic Dhillon
John Fraser, Amrit Mangat
Gila Martow, Ted McMeekin
Lou Rinaldi, Jagmeet Singh
Peter Tabuns
Committee Clerk / Greffier: Katch Koch